MELINDY

S·G·S·PERRY

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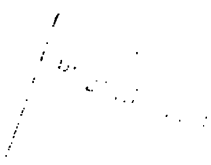

"AIN'T I BEEN SINGIN' JES' FINE"

MELINDY

BY

STELLA GEORGE STERN PERRY

NEW YORK
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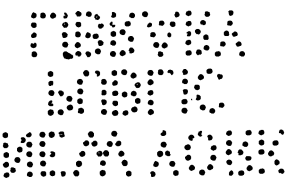
1919

TO

ELIZABETH BANKS



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MELINDY

CHAPTER I

MELINDY INTRODUCES YOU TO THE BIG WHITE HOUSE

THIS is mainly about Melindy.

"Everybody lubs Melindy," says that small person herself. "Everybody lubs Melindy, 'cause I'se so pleasant!"

Melindy lives with "her white folks" in the Big White House. She is the little sister of Sis Suky, the capable cook. But Melindy never thinks of herself as limited by that relationship. She thinks of her white folks as belonging to her,—"'cause us jess lubs us, us does!"—and so they think of her as theirs, her white folks who find Melindy "so pleasant."

The first thing that catches the eye, as you draw near the Big White House, the last to leave the memory as you recall it, is the fence that surrounds the garden. Not that it is insistent; on the contrary, the dull green slats fade inconspicuously into the foliage. But it is such a futile fence and so strikingly fails to keep the garden in check!

Riotous star-jasmine, honeysuckle and passion-

flower vines leap over the pickets and fling festoons of triumph and perfumes of delight onto the pavement outside. Saucy ox-eyed daisies and johnny-jump-ups, red flowering verbena and other inquisitive blooms put out their pretty heads between the slats. Close to the ground, even the timid blue lobelia dares to creep to the freedom of the street. And, over all, great magnolias raise yellow candles in snowy globes, and tall oleanders and gay azaleas flaunt their glory of bloom.

The garden is a careless garden, planted as Nature would plant, if she made up her mind to summon all the shades of color in the world into one gorgeous mass of blossoms.

Climbing roses riot over trellises; sweet tea roses border the grassy walks; bold tree roses exalt their stately beauty and clustering, plebeian bush roses make joyous banks of color.

There are battalions of red lilies and pure clouds of their white sisters, fluttering heaps of the well-named butterfly lilies, splendid trumpet-bearing cohorts of the lilium auratum.

The flowering crepe-myrtle trees,— each a huge bouquet of bloom,— drop crinkled petals, pink, white, purple, crimson, upon the grass.

Fruit trees,— fig and pomegranate, Japan plum, orange and mulberry,— and rich grape arbors stand sensible of their obligations at the seasons of flower and fruit.

The bayoneted palms are marshaled in long pro-

tective ranks and a huge live-oak, heavy with hoary moss, shades the Big White House and casts a partial reflection in the water-lily pool.

The square Big White House stands on a narrow street in the very heart of New Orleans. It used to be a plantation manor when the old French city of courtyards was miles away from it. But now the "new city,"— the Americanized city of gardens,— has grown far beyond it and clasped it in its arms.

The pretty mistress of the Big White House, "Miss Carrie," as the darky servants call her,— after their quaint custom of using the given name for respect and affection,—"Marse George," her young husband, and their four hearty children rule happily here.

Miss Carrie's blonde beauty, the ideal loveliness of the angels in Melindy's eyes, is not more admired by her household than her mothering spirit is beloved. As to "Marse George," Melindy says, "He sho' am de smartes' lawyer in Noo 'leans, ma Marse George he is. But dat ain' all. He's de beatenes' glorifier too. 'What's glorifier?' How-come you-all doan' know what glorifier is? A glorifier is a pusson dat makes you feel dat Glory's done come now."

Their children are Peter the Dreamer, Eustace the Little Judge, Eulalia the Perfect and Baby the Baby.

These, with Cousin Nathalie, whose life is so tied up with Melindy's machinations, are the "white folks" of the Big White House.

But Nathalie is at college when Melindy's tale be-

gins and the Big White House is not itself until we get her home again. For Nathalie was Miss Carrie's baby before Miss Carrie had babies of her own,— since her sweet cousin, the elder sister of her girlhood, put wee Nathalie trustingly into Miss Carrie's arms and was not afraid to die and leave her there. Alas! Baby Nathalie's father could not but follow soon. But the lovely girl, Our Nathalie, at college writing home has a real home to write to in the Big White House and truly is a daughter there. She is "Our Nathalie" to the loving family, "Our Own Missy" to the admiring servants and "Ma Babe Growin' Up" to the children's old black Mammy who had nursed her on her bosom.

General Haviland you must know because he is the house-friend,— or was before the trouble came, the useless, distressful trouble that Melindy will take in hand.

"I suttinly did fix up dem ructions," said Melindy afterwards. "Ain' I smaht teh fix dem up so pretty?"

General Haviland and his "boys," the nephews of his adoption, live, when this tale begins, in a tiny cottage set in a pale-toned garden. The garden is the good gentleman's delight and the delicate tones of the flowers,— so surprisingly gentle for a stern old soldier's taste,— are a conscious setting for a memory.

Our Nathalie's mother had owned such gentle-hued flower beds — all of pale lavender and delicate rose

and yellow fading to white — and the General had loved her. But that is long behind us now!

Perhaps all of these white folks and their friends, of whom you shall learn, are much more interesting than a little brown girl, Melindy. And, to be sure, the intertwined story of their joys and sorrows is the tale I have to tell. But first you must know Melindy; because it is still Melindy who shall lead you into the Big White House.

For neither position nor power,— and not even character,— wins the center of the stage.

The white spot-light of Stardom is leveled on Personality.

CHAPTER II

INSTRUCTING MELINDY

Little Melindy was singing. She had a thin, treble pipe of a voice that rose to tenuous heights without becoming shrill. Little Melindy was fond of using it. She walked up and down the garden-path between the rows of tall, pink phlox, shaking her head until every separate little "pigtail" swayed with the music.

She was a pretty little pickaninny of the roundish, browny, shiny, soft-eyed, dimpled type that made women exclaim, "Isn't she dear?"

She held out her faded blue pinafore now and then, as if tempted to dance, as she sang joyously —

"It's hahd teh lub,
It's hahd teh lub,
An' it's berry hahd teh mek up yo' min';
Fo' you done gone an' busted up
Lots o' li'l heahts;
But you ain' a-gwine-a bus' up mine!"

"You, M'lindy!" called her sister Suky from the kitchen window; "you, M'lindy, you quit singin' dat-ar nonsense!"

Melindy's sister Suky was the cook in the Big

White House. She had "fotched M'lindy down f'um de country teh try an' mek some sort o' human bein' out ob her, 'stead ob jess a fool nigger."

And, "An' I clar ter goodness, Miss Carrie," she said to the mistress of the Big White House, "when I done seen dat chile a-comin' I suttinly was glad teh hab a chance teh feed 'er up. 'Cause she sho'ly wuz jess a li'l bag o' bones a-rattlin' tegedder whenebber she walked."

But Suky's troubles began with Melindy's coming. For, although it was not difficult to convert the little "bag o' bones" into a cherubic plumpness, her moral training presented graver problems.

Little Melindy, like many other soft, sweet, round, acquiescent, apparently docile creatures, had a bewildering way of following her own will, without seeming to dispute authority. She would listen to Suky's instructions, rapt like one in a vision — and ignore them as completely as one in a dream.

Suky was a born stoic; Melindy a natural epicurean. Suky was religious to the point of fanaticism — a "shouting Baptist" without the least capitulation, an apostle of plainness, severity, sacrifice. Melindy was a perfect pagan, joying in each day's joys, a lover of flowers and song and food and sunshine and, especially, of admiration.

"You, M'lindy," called Suky from the kitchen window, "you, M'lindy, you quit singin' dat-ar nonsense. Dat sort-er squealin's jess a was'e ob breath!"

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Melindy, dimpling and grinning, showing two per-

fect rows of new, small, white teeth, appealed to Miss Carrie.

"Ain't I been singin' fine?" she exulted, "I jess lubs teh sing so pretty."

"And Miss Carrie," she continued happily, "is you seen ma new petticoat an' ma new w'ite dress? I'se gwine-a wear 'em Sunday teh de Sunday School."

"Why, how glad Sis will be that you are going to Sunday School!"

"Yes, ma'am. I'se gwine. I'se gotter show dem stuck-up kids ma new w'ite dress an' ma petticoat. But I suttinly does hope none ob 'em will git teh fightin' an' scrappin' wif me lak dey done las' time. 'Cause ef I wants teh fight, Miss Carrie, I doan' need teh go teh Sunday School teh fight."

This pacific desire was not fulfilled. Either the pretty white dress or its wearer's consequent air of superiority — or perhaps it was Melindy's type of sweetness, which many natures find cloying — something developed a violent antipathy to Melindy in the souls of the three little darky girls who shared her bench in the class. Voices soon waxed loud, and tears became imminent.

Melindy ran home, weeping pitifully, and told the story of her humiliation. The little girls' quarrel having grown vociferous enough to disturb all of the young congregation, the teacher was moved to stern measures of discipline. She stood the four culprits in a corner and braided together the upstanding little tufts of their wiry hair.

"Done fastened me right up to dem-ar Sunday Schoolers," Melindy wailed. "Done plaited one ob ma pigtails teh Mamie's, an' Mamie's yuther pigtail teh Jinny's, an' Jinny's yuther pigtail teh Iph'genier's, an' Iph'genier's yuther pigtail teh ma yuther pigtail. Done stood us up all hunched ober and braided togedder. An' her talkin' teh we-all 'bout lub one anudder! I'se shore I could lub one anudder much better ef I ain't been fastened up teh dem."

Any suggestion of Sabbath School attendance after that brought forth such bitter tears and beseechings that the tender-hearted Suky always melted and allowed her little charge to receive only such training in piety as she herself could give.

That was stern and unequivocal enough. Little Melindy would listen in a state of emotional ecstasy, on the verge of tears, trembling in her soul at the picture Suky drew of her horrible vanities and their consequences.

But when the preachment was over and the preceptor well pleased with the apparent effect, the pupil would breathe a sigh of relief, break into dimples, and say, "Now, Sis Suky, kin I go an' put on ma pink ribbons an' go inteh de house an' sing fo' de ladies? Dey jess lubs teh hyear me sing so pretty!"

The only thing for which she had stable and continued reverence was the parrot — a handsome and accomplished South American bird with a majestic mien and interesting habits. In Pol's presence Melindy was ever subdued, grave and perfect in conduct.

Beyond his immediate neighborhood she would say, in an awe-struck whisper, to her little white playmates, the children of the Big White House, "Dat Polly, dat ain' no nachul bird. No, sirree! Kin a nachul bird *talk?* Dat's ole folks come back, das whar dat is. Dat's ole folks whar didn't talk up when dey 'uz hyah befo', but jess sot 'round a-grumpy and a-glum, an' jess snap out 'Yes' an' 'No' at yer, an' yer couldn' mek 'em talk no way ner nohow. Now dey's gotter finish deir talkin'. Dat's what dat Polly is."

At the secular "day school" Melindy flourished. She learned to read by leagues at a time. She soon exhausted the school library and began to nibble at the library in the Big House. No one having directed her choice there, the effect of its catholicity was soon apparent.

"Miss Carrie, honey," she announced one morning, bearing a tray of pansies to her beloved mistress, "hyah is yo' pansies — dat's fo' thoughts; an' de washwoman, Rose Mary, done gone erway, an' dat's fo' remembrance. An' how many young gem'p'mens been enamelled ob you, Miss Carrie?"

But the book she loved best was a story-book of which she spoke to her Sis as "de li'l brown book 'bout a kin' li'l boy."

She made a song about the kind young hero, and went about singing it as she helped water the garden: —

De kine little boy knowed jess what teh do;
He nebber had teh lissen teh no Sister Sue.

The spirit of this ballad aroused Suky's ire. "Lissen teh dat chile talk!" she exclaimed, almost in tears. "You, M'lindy, doan' you nebber read dat li'l brown book no more, ef hit puts sech notions in yo' head."

Tears welled up in Melindy's eyes at being thus deprived of her dear delight. For the first time in her smiling little life a large sense of injustice rankled in her soul. She unconsciously felt the difference between having envied the kind little boy because he did not have to obey an elder sister and having failed to obey her own.

"I ain' done *nothin'*," she whimpered; "I ain' done *nothin' 'tall.*"

But Suky was adamant. Melindy was irreligious and vain, would not sing hymns or go to Sunday School, and now she was learning to resent authority.

After a few days of silent longing for the forbidden favorite story-book, Melindy tremblingly ventured to ask again for a reversal of the sentence.

"Sis Suky," she said, "you knows *I* doan' know what's right an' what's wrong, an' so, ob co'se, I'se gotter do jess es you tells me. But de kin' li'l boy in de book *he* knowed what's right. Das why-for he ain' had ter min' nobody. Please'm, Sis Suky, cain't I finish de story? I done on'y jess readed a li'l bit. I wuz jess a-comin' to find out what dat kin' li'l white

boy done when he growed up an' be a man. Please'm, I won't sing erbout it no more."

But Suky saw her advantage. At last something has made an impression on Melindy's mercurial temperament. And Suky made use of it. Melindy might go into the library to read the book, if she would first learn a hymn — or if she would refrain from making smiles at her reflection in the water-lily pool — or if she would not forget her prayers — according to the day and the temptation.

Melindy's prayers were original. She accepted the prescribed formulas, running through them very quickly, and then adding, with deeper feeling, "En' please, Sir, make ev'ybody sweet an' kin' to Melindy!"

One morning in the mild Louisiana December, Melindy came home from school beaming with pride. She had successfully written her first letter — a Christmas letter to Suky — written it with pains and triumphant rejoicings, as follows: —

"*Dear Sister:*

It is with me to take much pleasure in ritten to you a short letter to tell you don't forgit me Chrismus that to send me a Chrismus doll and a book about the kind little boy. Think me Chrismus evening, think me Chrismus night, think me Chrismus mornin', and don't forgit to rite.— Frum yer sister,

MELINDY."

Suky was too proud of the little letter itself to rebuke Melindy's pride in it when it was delivered. But she was shrewd enough to make capital out of the appeals. She promised the child to grant her requests for Christmas gifts if Melindy would not only go to church on the coming Sunday, but would also return home able to tell what the minister had said.

Melindy had been to church before. But, during the long opening prayer, her mind had always wandered to more fertile fields of the imagination, and during the reading of notices before the sermon she had always composed herself for slumber. Suky's hope that the child might "come forward to the mourners' bench" and "get religion" was never fulfilled.

Melindy sighed when the bargain was proposed to her, but, with her usual surface docility, assented.

When the important Sunday came, however, she found that church had acquired a new interest. The congregation was alert with knowledge of the dreadful fact that Sister Hannah Jackson was going to be rebuked by the minister and perhaps put out of the membership.

All through the service preliminary to the sermon, Sister Hannah Jackson, the culprit, sat up in the front pew, swaying back and forth, holding her handkerchief before her face and uttering low moans.

Melindy watched her constantly, in a horrible fas-

cination. She forgot that her Christmas presents were to depend upon her memory of the prayer and sermon. She saw nothing but the suffering, wretched figure of the backslider; heard nothing but the occasional low moans, each of which penetrated her young bosom as sorely as the bosom from which they were wrung.

Suky looked upon the little tear-stained face in despair. No exhortation of the most eloquent preacher, no appeals by hymn or prayer had ever developed in Melindy the degree of emotion that came so quickly from sympathy with a sinner.

The sermon was a tirade against Sister Hannah Jackson and her sins. These the dusky pastor specified. She had attended a card party and dance, and had there imbibed of beer — an overdose of beer. Her pastor was thankful to say that it had not formerly been her habit to take any intoxicant. But, "Behole!" he said, "de debbil done clutched dis sinner at las'. She done sought teh hide her sin. But, passin' right by my house, right nex' door teh dis hyah blessed chu'ch, she done call out, loud 'nough for me an' my family ter hyear:

"'Land sakes!' she done call out, 'seems lak ma legs done belong teh some udder darky. Seems lak dey doan' belong teh me!' An' den she sot right down on de steps ob de church, drunken an' in de grip ob Satan.

"Sistern an' breddern, I'se sorry ter hab ter be

hahd on dis hyah goat dat's done got ermong our sheep —" Here the minister paused, the culprit wailed, and Melindy sobbed aloud.

She remembered Hannah Jackson as a guest of her sister — a cheery, heartsome woman who never failed to bring her a ginger-nut. Suky had herself called her a good church-member. It burned Melindy's little heart to see this dismal transformation.

The minister broke forth into bitter reproaches. He said that the awful sin might be overlooked, except for the insult to the church. But now he felt it his duty, in order to protect his people from contamination and to uphold a severe standard of morality, to put the wicked one out of the community as he felt that Jesus would wish.

"He would not! He wouldn' wish no sech-a-thing!" cried an angry treble voice, and the docile, pliant, weak Melindy, turned into a thing of flame, darted up the aisle, straight to the minister's desk.

"He would not! You'se a sinner yo'se'f teh done said it. He nebber did put no sinners out. He done lubbed de sinners, spech'ly when dey's sorry. He done said so. He would-a fergive you, Sis Hannah Jackson, 'cause you *is* sorry. He would-a lub you. So doan' cry no mo'. But dis-ar minister an' dis-ar crowd! He would-a spoke 'is min' ter you. He done said nobody got no claim ter cas' stones less'n dey ain't no sinners demself. An' you is sinnin' dis hyah minute. You's Parisees, you is. Ebery las' one ob

yer git right down on yer knees and pray fo' dis hyah Parisee minister ob yourn teh git sorry fo' his sins and learn you-all teh lub one anudder!"

Her people are an emotional people, and the fiery child seemed inspired. Sobbing together, the minister and congregation got down on their knees and prayed that the spirit of love and forgiveness might descend upon them.

Melindy walked out of the church with the weeping Suky in her wake. Once outside, she dimpled and turned about politely.

"Did yer hyear me, Sis?" she cried triumphantly. "Did yer hyear me a-gin it teh de minister? Didn' I done spoke up pretty fo' Sis Hannah Jackson?"

"You, M'lindy," asked Suky in a daze, "you, M'lindy, how come you knows so much erbout Jesus an' you ain't nebber been teh Sunday School an' I ain't nebber been able teh teach yer?"

"Why, Sis Suky, didn' you know? Jesus is de name ob de kin' li'l boy dat's in de li'l brown book."

Catching a glimpse of her mistress coming down the street, the jubilant Suky ran forward to greet her.

"Bress de Lawd, Miss Carrie," she called, "M'lindy's done got religion!"

"Is I? Is I, Miss Carrie?" asked Melindy.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING FRIENDSHIP

MELINDY had the social instinct strongly developed.

Every day she returned from school trailing a line of dusky followers behind her. Large-eyed and solemn, they would regard her in charmed silence, while Melindy prattled and chattered on unwearied, flashing her bright teeth and brighter eyes, twirling on her light heels, posturing and gesticulating, very conscious of her attractions.

Indeed, there was sometimes a suspicion in the eyes of her mistress that Melindy clung to her friends more for their utility as an applauding audience than for any fascinating quality of their minds or hearts.

Chief of these constant satellites were Remus and Ramus, more generally known among their associates as "C'lina Dinah's Stupid Twinses."

Remus was a girl, tall, gaunt, dingy yellow, with lightish hair,— that unusual gift, highly prized by the negro, but invariably hideous upon him and repellent to the Caucasian eye. It was braided in two "pigtails," so tightly drawn from her forehead that her eyebrows remained involuntarily lifted in an expression of unending surprise.

Ramus, her brother, was her exact counterpart in

feature and coloring, but he lacked her stature and was delicate and stoop-shouldered. His box-like head was shaved close and turned round on his too-slender neck, as the picturesque speech of Melindy put it, "dess essackly lak a sick chickum lookin' for help."

Their mother, C'lina Dinah, was a busy washer-woman-by-the-day, a visiting laundress much in demand.

Said she, "Suttinly it am a blessin' dem chillun done come in pairs. Fo' dey's allus Remus teh look atter Ramus, an' Ramus teh look atter Remus. Ef dey had done come sep'rate I'd shorely had teh gi'n 'em away long ago. I ain' got no time teh see teh nothin'."

Her care, however, was greater than her statement of it. For Remus and Ramus always shone with soap as if they had been polished and so bristled with starch that they crackled — to Melindy's joy — when they sat down.

Melindy's dashing ways were the one glimpse of grace that dazzled the dull eyes of the "twinses," her bright imaginings the one little lattice through which they peeped into fairyland.

They would pretend to be anything she wished of them,— horses to draw her chariot when she was "lady's maid to de Queen ob Yurrup," lambs for her to devour when she was a "rarin' tearin' bear," and pupils to be punished unceasingly when she played teacher.

They were even jealous of her less constant followers. These were roly-poly Lucy, fat, slow, black and pretty and chronically gummy with all-day-suckers, —an adamantine sweetmeat perched on the end of a little stick,— and Artemisia Yunnersuckle. Artemisia was blasé, grown-up at thirteen. She was employed to "mind a baby" for an hour every afternoon and gloried in the importance this charge gave her, though it made her leave her playmates earlier. Last of these were grinning little Nanny who stuttered,—"her ma cooked fo' de Mayor"— and big Jake, the woodchopper's boy, who rarely spoke at all.

On the afternoons when her little white companions, the children in the Big House, were practising for their music lessons or away at dancing school, Melindy would lead her little colored friends to their places in a circle under the mulberry tree,— a magical shady place back of the house, the sweet grass under the tree a literal carpet of the mild-flavored, cool purple berries.

"Eat yo' fill," Melindy would invite grandly, "Miss Carrie say yer kin. An' now lissen ter me —."

Thenceforward the musical appealing lilt of her voice was heard, expounding, exhorting, declaiming, interrupted scarcely at all in its smooth flow by the occasional interjections of the others.

"You Art'misyer," said Melindy, one beautiful day, "you got teh stop dat cryin' an' a-carryin' on. S'pose you *did* go an' lose yo' place tendin' teh dat

ugly, li'l red-haided baby ob Jedge Slocum's. Ain't yo' ma got ten er twelve babies for you ter tend teh?"

"'Tain't dat, Melindy," wailed poor Artemisia, "I shore doan' want fo' no mo' babies teh tend. An' 'tain't de money I cyah's 'bout, 'cause I nebber *got* no money. But Jedge Slocum done call me a plumb fool nigger and Mis' Slocum done say 'twan't no use bein' kind teh me, 'cause I ain't *got* no heart. And I *is* got a heart, Melindy. I's got two ob 'em, right hyah in ma wrists. You kin hear 'em beat."

Melindy eyed her with suspicion.

"Sho' you is, Art'misyer," she crooned comfortingly, rubbing her little round cheek upon the other's bony shoulder. "But, honey, what is you done teh dat Slocum baby? How-come Miss Jedge Slocum to say you ain't got no heart?"

Artemisia kindled with the outrage.

"Done nothin' but be kind to it.

"Looky, Melindy. Dis hyah mulb'ry is Miss Jedge Slocum and dis hyah mulb'ry is me, and dis hyah li'l spoiled red mulb'ry is dat ole li'l spoiled red kid o' de Slocums. Now speak up, mulb'ries, an' show 'em what we done done."

Then, moving each mulberry as she spoke for it, after the manner of marionettes, Artemisia said:

"'Now, Art'misyer, I'se gwine out.'

"'Yes'm, Miss Slocum.'

"'Doan' let de baby cry, Art'misyer.'

"'No'm, Miss Slocum.'

"'Give him whatebber he asks fo' to play wif, Art'misyer.'

"'Yes'm, Miss Slocum.'

"'Be special keerful an' doan' let him git fretful, Art'misyer.'

"'No'm, Miss Slocum.'

"'Be kind an' patient, Art'misyer.'

"'Yes'm, Miss Slocum.'

"'Good-by, Art'misyer.'"

Here the "Miss Slocum" mulberry was removed from the scene.

"'Ya-h-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!'

"'Hesh up, chile, hesh up! Didn' you hear yo' ma say not teh cry!'

"'Ya-h-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-h.'

"'What you want, honey plum? Oh! is you 'fraid ob dat ole yaller spider? Well, now, den I'll tek him away.'

"'Ya-h-a-a-a-a!'

"'Oh! you *wants* de spider? Well, dearie, den hyah it is. Yo' ma done said you could hab whatebber you wanted for. Yeah's de spider. Take it.'

"Now, I axes you, M'lindy,— I dess axes you," sobbingly, "did I done tole dat baby teh *eat up* dat spider like he done?"

"'Cose not, Art'misyer. But yer see, dat Miss Slocum, she's got red hair, and de Jedge he ain't got no hair 'tall, but his haid's good an' red, an' de baby's got red hair, too. And I wouldn't nebber work fo' nobody whar's got red hair, 'cause dey jes' natch'ly

ain't got no patience,— red hairs ain't. An' I wouldn't work fo' Miss Jedge Slocum, nohow, not ef she had blue hair wif green trimmin's. 'Cause she's alluz complainin' erbout de weather. Ebery day's too hot, er too cole, er too wet er too dry fo' po' Miss Jedge Slocum. An' I tells you, Art'misyer, dat ef de Lord can't please her, I ain't a goin' teh try to.

"Now, hesh yo' cryin', and I'll tell you-all about de beau'ful li'l new Spanish friend I got —"

"Doan' want teh hear 'bout her; you'se alluz gittin' new friends, M'lindy. Me'n Ramus we thinks you'se got 'nough friends, we does," grumbled Remus jealously.

"Oh-ho!" dimpled Melindy, proudly, "dat's dess 'cause you-all likes me so much, 'cause I'se so pleasant. But you ain't got no call teh be jealous of dis hyah new friend; 'cause she don't know she's a friend ob mine. She ain't nebber met me yet."

"How-come she's a friend ob your'n, den, ef you ain' nebber met her?" rumbled the taciturn Jacob.

"Ye-e-e-s. How — c-c-ome —" struggled Nanny and subsided.

"She's ma friend, 'cause I likes her for my friend, dat's all. An' she can dance, like dis," pirouetted Melindy.

Hidden under Melindy's self-satisfaction was a touch of humility that made her desire a comrade to whom she could look upward, whom she could admire as her friends exalted her,— someone to lead her imagination as she led Ramus's. To be sure, she de-

lighted in a continued imitation of the four little white comrades, the children of her mistress. But here was a difference in kind. Here, too, was a little of that familiarity which lessens hero-worship. Thus she admired and emulated her "li'l Miss Eulalia's" graces; but she knew her to be stubborn on occasion and had seen her justly spanked.

Also, there lay in this simple little heart that touch of snobbery that is native to the negro,— a desire to flash upon the astonished gaze of her dusky companions a playmate grander than they.

One day, walking through streets unknown to her, Melindy had come upon a large and stately red building, set in a garden of many paths. A heavy brick fence, topped with broken glass, surrounded it. Melindy had been able to see the garden only by peeping through the inch-wide squares in a green lattice-gate set into the fence.

Within, she had seen sisters of charity walking gravely to and fro, while many children romped on the paths.

"Wha's dem pale li'l ladies in sad clothes doin' wif all dem chilluns?" she asked herself.

"Dey can't be orfums, 'cause dey ain't got on dem li'l all-like dresses," she thought, "an' dey can't be a school, 'cause it's done past de school-time. What *is* dem chilluns?"

Melindy had never heard of a convent boarding-school, certainly not of such a school as this, where most of the pupils were the children of South Amer-

ican Spaniards, many burned by the tropical sun into duskiness that made Melindy think them akin to herself.

One little girl attracted her. Her own characteristics recognized themselves. This child was the center of all excitement. Wherever her slim little legs darted the whole flock followed. When she laughed her light bird-laugh, all laughed and chirped and twittered. When she ceased, all quieted. This child only, the gentle sisters restrained when the play waxed too boisterous.

"Quietly, Hecuba, quietly," they would admonish, and the uproar was stilled,— for a moment, until 'Cuba's spirits broke bounds again.

Hecuba was light as a butterfly, lithe as a lizard, darkly beautiful. Not Ferdinand, not Prospero, not Ariel ever charmed Miranda more completely than little Melindy was enthralled by the witch-child, Hecuba.

Almost daily, at every opportunity, after that first sight of her, she stole away to watch Hecuba at play. Usually eager to be seen herself and admired, now her timid desire was merely to stay in the shadow, to peep unseen and adoring through the latticed gate. Always a leader, original and daring, it was now her secret satisfaction to ape Hecuba's example. Her deepest delight was to find that her small reflection in the water-lily pool could by the magic of mimicry be made to resemble Hecuba's.

She was late in coming home after school almost daily, to Suky's indignation and Remus's disgust, for

Melindy must make the detour that afforded an ecstatic peep at her unconscious friend.

In her inner self she had made a heart-comrade of Hecuba, who never looked through the lattice and had never seen the worshiping brown eyes glowing through the little squares.

"De sisters done call her 'beautiful Cuba,'" Melindy went on to the Twinses and the others, "and she sho' is beautiful, chilluns. She walk erlong diser way an' she walk erlong dat-er way an' her skirts go swishy-wishy-squishy like a lady's. An' she spring on her tippy toes! And sassy! She even made up faces at de teachers."

"Dey is *sisters*, an' she ain't got no call teh make up faces at dem," grunted Remus. "I ain't no beautiful Cuby, Melindy, but I done got better manners den dat. My ma ain't fotched me up teh make up faces at nobody."

"No, Melindy," Ramus followed his twin's lead, "she done been brung up orful bad, dat 'Cuby is. *We* wouldn't nebber make up ugly faces at nobody 'tall."

A strange transformation took place in the gentle Melindy. In defense of her beloved "friend" she developed unsuspected qualities. Her placidity turned to rancour. Her desire to be "pleasant" vanished. Even her winsome affectionateness, her love of peace and amiable tendency to flattery fled before her wrath.

Cruelly she called out, to the faithful twins, "No, you wouldn't make up ugly faces at nobody, you

wouldn't. And more den dat, you wouldn't *need* teh. All you'd need teh do is jess ter *look* at dem wif yo' own faces."

Ramus, after one shocked glance began to cry. Remus rose in hurt dignity and took his hand.

"A'right fo' you, M'lindy. We'uns ain' gwine play wif you no mo'," she cried as they went gravely, sadly away, crackling with starch and indignation.

Art'misyer and Lucy sniggered delightedly and even Jake and Nanny grinned appreciation at Melindy's sally. It was indeed apparent that Remus and Ramus were not things of beauty.

But Melindy felt no triumph, no pleasure in their applause. For the first time her self-complacency was disturbed; she was not proud of Melindy. For the first time, she had consciously hurt another. She felt hurt herself and conscience-stricken and, after the manner of hasty guilt, angry with her victims.

Hot tears burned her eyes. Her soft mouth quivered. She swallowed hard.

"Well," she murmured in self-justification, "dey suttinly shouldn' a said sech low-down meanness about Cuby. 'Cause she *is* nice Cuby is, nicer'n *anybody*. Good-by, you all. I guess I'll go see Cuby now."

But Artemisia, who enjoyed rousing angry passions in herself for others, was not willing to have the excitement abate.

"Cuby's a-norful funny name fo' a pusson. Cuby's a city whar de big brown cigars and de li'l brown bananas comes fum."

"It's a lubly, lubly, dubly name," sobbed Melindy in tears. "It ain't Cuby anyhow. Mas'r George says it's *He*cuby. But I said it must be *She*-cuby, 'cause Cuby's a li'l gal. *She*cuby is so pretty; it-is-so!"

Melindy hastened toward the sisters' school, trying to nourish a vision of Beautiful Cuba in her bright, wayward gayety. But always and always a little rope of conscience pulled the door of her imagination until it closed upon that pleasing picture. Through less pretentious entrance came the tear-stained face of Ramus and Remus's sad surprise.

They had followed her with dog-like fidelity for years, all her life it seemed to Melindy. Now, never more was she to be the fay of their fairyland. She had banished herself from their love. So many remembered acts of fealty, so warm a sense of their constant affection rose to smite her that she ran to the red schoolhouse to fortify her soul by a happy pilgrimage to the beautiful friend for whose sake she had offended them.

Perhaps Cuba would see her to-day. Perhaps she would take some notice. Her heart beat quickly, as the radiant hope flooded her being and bore away the memory of the injured "twinses" from her mercurial soul.

Hecuba Inez di Hernandez, the most difficult charge ever inflicted upon the good sisters in the stately red convent, had just reached the climax of insubordination. After a day of passionate homesickness and

wild rebellion she had climbed into the topmost branches of the fig-tree. There, safely beyond her guardians' reach, she regaled herself upon sweet forbidden fruit and bitter sulkiness.

The sisters, expostulation having failed to affect her, had fulfilled their dread threat and sent for the priest to help them.

Hecuba, inwardly quaking, outwardly laughed scornfully. Melindy, on the pavement below, recognizing her voice and not much surprised to hear it descend from the delightful green fastnesses of the fig-tree, lifted her eyes and saw the angry, tear-stained face of her inamorata.

Sympathy and the fellowship of guilt made her exclaim, unthinkingly, "Why, 'Cuba, what is you doin' up dar? What's de matter, po' li'l Cuba? Tell yo' Melindy."

Hecuba glared upon her and said nothing.

"Doan' be 'fraid," coaxed the sweet wheedling voice of Melindy, "I'se only jess li'l Melindy. I'se yo' li'l friend, I is. I wants teh befriend you, Cuba, —'cause I *is* yo' friend. You tell yo' li'l bes' friend, Melindy, all about it!"

"Go 'way! Go 'way! Speak not to me!" ventured Cuba in her limited English.

"I isn't 'fraid, honey," smiled Melindy, "you lem-me comfort you. I'se jess a lubly li'l comfort. You and me we lubs us, us does."

The irritated, nervous, reckless heiress of the Hernandez, already ablaze with the bitterness of life, in-

furiated at this persistent plebeian familiarity, reached from the fig-tree to the top of the wall, seized a loose bit of broken glass, and hurled it fiercely full upon Melindy.

The jagged edge hit the child's forehead and made an ugly cut. Trickling blood and sudden bitter tears flowed together.

Melindy's wail of fright and grief and pain brought the sisters hurrying to the door.

"Look, oh, look!" one cried sorrowfully. "See what our beautiful Cuba has done!"

"Beautiful nothin'!" sobbed Melindy, as they led her in to be tended, "They ain't nothin' beautiful about her!"

Beautiful Hecuba sat in the tree and took no heed. Little she could dream what part in after days, Melindy would play in her destiny.

Sad little Melindy, escorted by two kind sisters, went silently home through the last evening light. Her head was throbbing and her heart was sore.

"Remus wouldn't nebber done dat teh me," she thought, "she thinks I'se jess *lubly*, Remus does. And I is a-gwine teh be jess lubly teh Remus,— ef she'll ebber forgib me fo' talkin' teh her so mean."

Down in her heart she knew that Remus would.

Before the gate of the Big White House, stood the Twinses themselves. In the dim light they did not notice the dark outer bandage Melindy wore about her head, did not realize that she and the sisters were of one party.

"Melindy, honey," said poor Remus haltingly, in a breaking voice, "we'se sorry we went away mad, we suttinly is."

Melindy hugged her close and put out her hand for Ramus.

"I jess lubs you, I does. We jess lubs us, us does," she said.

"I know we ain't so pretty —" began Ramus.

"Shet up!" Melindy commanded with her fetching, smiling, jesting dictatorialness. "Lem-me tell you somep'n 'bout *pretty*. They's pretty outsides, an' they's pretty insides. I'se got pretty outsides, but you'se got pretty insides, Twinses."

"How come you got dat sore haid? What done hit you?" cried Remus in alarm.

Melindy hesitated.

"Oh," she said slowly, "I jess got — a — li'l — bit — hurted. Tain't nothin'. Go home now, Twinses."

They went obediently.

The sisters came out from the shadow. "Why did you not tell the children that Hecuba hit you?" asked one of them.

"Well, you see, m'am," said Melindy, in a slow, puzzled tone, "seems lak I dess *couldn't* tell on Cuba. 'Cause Cuba, she's — she used teh be — ma friend."

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER

LITTLE Miss Eulalia was explaining to Melindy the necessity of being careful in the stables.

Miss Eulalia was five years old and very dignified and proper. Except for an occasional redeeming outburst of wilfulness, she was a good child, with every ruffle, even every dimple, firmly, precisely placed and a profound respect for rules and for authority.

She had learned so many maxims that her uncles compared her prattle to a series of the "How-to-be-good" cards framed and exalted in the homes of the bourgeoisie. But for all her perfection, there was a sweet graciousness about Eulalia and a perfect freedom from self-consciousness that gave her virtues a decided allurement.

"You mus' be carefuller," she instructed Melindy, as the two sat on the white steps threading four-o'clock blossoms on strands of ribbon-grass. "You mus' be carefuller, Melindy, and not go right straight up to every horse that 'way. 'Specially in other folks' stables."

"Law, Missy," said Melindy loftily, "who is li'l you? And teachin' Melindy about hosses! Why, chile alive, I was borned and raised on a horse."

"Well, Melindy, maybe you understand the horse you was born and raised on. But every horse is different. You know about Mabel up at Pellatros'. Every time we went to Pellatros', Cousin Nathalie — this was when Cousin Nathalie was home — used to go in the stable and go and see all the horses. And Miss Helena Pellatro used to say, 'Be careful of Mabel; he's a very naughty horse, he bites people an' runs away.' And Cousin Nathalie only laughed. But once Mabel,— Cousin Nathalie hetched,— hatched,— hitched — Ah! that's it — *hitcheded* him on to a wagon and they started. And a whole lot o' men and ladies was on this wagon. An' then they were going. An' Mabel ranned very fast, galloped *very* fast. An' then everybody fell out the wagon. And Mademoiselle — this was when Mademoiselle was here — hurt her soldier — *shouldier* — an' one of the ladies that did fell off did got lame for a week.

"An' after that I don't think — I say I don't *think* — they never used Mabel any more, because he did do that accident.

"Flossie was a very, very, very good horse, and pretty. An' they used that after that.

"So you see, all horses are different, Melindy."

"Yes'm, Missy," replied Melindy, "so dey is. So dey is. But big, black Jedge whar lif's up his feet so high, like dis"— acting a jovial prance — "he ain't gwine hurt nobody. And Rastus done say I kin go out drivin' behine him some er dese fine days,

when Black Jedge go fo' he exercise. Maybe to-day!"

"Did Mr. Winfield tell Rastus you could go, Melindy?"

Rastus was the negro groom of Mr. Winfield, a horse-loving neighbor.

Melindy chuckled. "Now, Miss 'Lalia," she said sweetly, "doan' you go worry you li'l haid 'bout dat. *Rastus* done tole me I could go. An' what Mr. Winfield an' Rastus done tole each yuther or ain't done tole each yuther ain't none o' my buryin'. Ef *Rastus* ain't tole, *I* isn't a-gwine-teh.

"An speakin' o' buryin's,— what you 'spec, Missy? Arter dat time I fell offen de roof, a life insu'ance nigger-man he come-long, an' wanted Sis Suky teh git ma life insu'ed, an' she most done it."

"What d'ye mean,— life insured?"

Melindy rose and danced a little tarantella of pride.

"Glory!" she cried, "li'l brack Melindy knows more'n de white chilluns. Life insu'ance is what you git paid fo' dyin'."

"In Heaven?"

"No'm. Yer folks gits de money. Dey goes an' says, 'Well, sah, M'lindy's dead; now pay me.' An' the insu'ance folks, dey says, 'What was she wuth to you?' And dat's one reason I doan' want Sis Suky to buy no insu'ance on me; 'cause she alluz says I'se wuthless and I knows she'd fergit an' answer 'em, 'Nothin' 'tall, sah!' an' nebber git a penny.

"But dat ain't de really, truly reason I done persuaded Sis Suky not to buy no insu'ance on me. The real thing that sot me agin' it was a calendar dat insu'ance man had wif a pretty picture, showin' some dead pusson's relations gittin' paid. An', honeyplum, dey all look so puffictly happy, an' dey was dressed all up in *pink!* When I die it's gwine teh be sad enough fo' somebody to wear *black.* Ef dey doan't I sho'ly will come back an' ha'nt 'em."

"Hey-ey-o! You, Melindy!" a voice called over the azalea hedge, "Hey, you!"

"Dere's Rastus now, and Jedge," squealed Melindy, as the beautiful black horse came to an impatient stand before the gate. "Good-by, Miss 'Lalia, I'se gwine-a-ridin' wif Rastus, behine de fas'es' beauty horse in Noo 'Leans. Doan' you tell nobody." And she darted forward.

"Oh, Melindy! You better ask Suky," called the virtuous Eulalia.

But Melindy had sped down the walk on the tips of her flying toes and was already seated in the exercise cart beside grinning Rastus, himself as great a child as she.

Black Judge, whose respectable name misrepresented his lawless spirit, darted down the street, breaking all speed laws as cheerily as the two other members of the rebellious trio were breaking the rules of their households.

Eulalia stood sadly in the midst of the discarded four-o'clock blooms. Then she gathered them neatly

into her apron, cleared the steps of the last leafy trace and stolidly went indoors. She did not betray Melindy.

But as the hours went by without bringing the return of her playmate, more and more often the anxious little figure appeared at the gateway, looking up and down the street and holding back the tears with scant success.

Soon the sudden darkness fell. There are no true twilights in Louisiana. It is always intense day or languid night.

The dinner chimes sounded. The early stars shone forth.

Poor little Eulalia! Torn between anxiety that prompted her to confide in the adult rulers of her world and the loyalty,— so early learned by a girl with brothers,— that makes talebearing a high crime, poor little Eulalia fastened her eyes upon the first star that met her lifted gaze. She repeated breathlessly five times, this magic rhyming panacea:

"Star, star, star bright,
Very first star I see to-night,
I wiss, I wiss, I wiss I might,
Get the wiss I wiss to-night!"

Then, with perfect faith, she wished for Melindy's return — that she might come safely home before Suky missed her, as Suky soon must do. For Melindy was being instructed to wait upon the table, and dinner time was near.

Eulalia entered the house feeling secure and happy. The first star had never failed her.

But now, alas! her faith in the charm was to be shaken. For, as she crossed the threshold of the great door, Peter and Eustace her "little big brothers" came rioting down the broad stairway, shouting excitedly, "Where's Melindy? Suky says Melindy isn't home, Mother!" And faintly from the rear of the house could be heard Suky's high voice, "Melindy! Come right hyah dis minute!"

Eulalia trembled.

"Don't worry, dear!" came the master's cheery, reassuring voice, calling to the mistress. "The little imp's gone off to pay a visit somewhere. You know she never did have any idea of time."

"To be sure," answered Mother, barely relieved, "but no one has seen her since she came home from school. I do sometimes think, my dear, that these little pickaninnies are more care than one's own children. They are so doubly irresponsible. Where can the child be?"

Eulalia could no longer be silent. Her lovely mother must not be anxious or deceived.

Timidly, in tears, she said, "I want to tell you someping," and unfolded her story.

Remembering the wickedness of Mabel, she herself remained full of fears. But the rest of the family and even Suky felt at ease. For Rastus, they were sure, would take care of Melindy.

"But," said Suky to the salad dressing, "dis hyah

beatin' you is gittin' ain't only jess fo' you. Not by a pretty sight. Dis hyah beatin' is what Marse George's dramatic soci'ty would call a dress rehearsal fo' dat pesky li'l no-count nigger."

But when dinner had been eaten and the wanderer had not returned Suky's ire changed to alarm, Miss Carrie grew perturbed, the boys pestered her with troubled questions, Eulalia sobbed aloud and even the wakeful baby called "'Lindy, 'Lindy!" from his nursery above-stairs.

Still no sound of wheels or hoofs.

Lewis, the butler, was despatched to the Winfield home and returned with the comfortless message that neither Rastus nor Black Judge was in the stable.

Marse George, Lewis and Jacques, the gardener, started off,— they knew not whither,— to look for clews.

"Find her, oh! find her, my dear," called Miss Carrie, suddenly realizing how deeply the child had grown into her heart.

Poor Suky wept in the kitchen finding no solace even in dear black Mammy's ample, comforting embrace.

Meanwhile, adventurous Melindy was eagerly engaged upon the great adventure of her life.

She had started off, indeed, behind the fastest beauty in New Orleans. Squeals of delight from little Melindy, guffaws of proud joy from big Rastus floated like a pennant behind their progress.

Melindy had not greatly exaggerated when she said

that she was "borned and raised" on horseback. Her father had been a jockey in his youth, a hanger-on about racing stables in his later years. Suky righteously and self-righteously followed the tendencies of her mother, who, a pillar of churchly respectability and a *blanchisseuse* of note, had given "precious li'l time teh dat gallivantin' man." But the light-hearted Melindy was like the little rider, a devotee of excitement, a lover of horses.

Through the city streets dashed Black Judge. Thence, down the long white ribbon of shell-road that lay between the black velvet semi-tropical woods and the silver stream, Bayou St. John, away they sped.

The woods were full of yellow jasmine and the narrow bayou was studded with purple water-hyacinth. The air was warm and sweet and the afternoon sun a glory.

Melindy beamed and dimpled. But, "Does you really think we'uns kin git teh de Wes' End and back befo' dinner?" she asked with a sudden qualm.

"No, honey; not befo' *befo'* dinner, we can't. But we kin git back befo' *after* dinner."

The West End, a languorous lakeside resort, was still several miles away. Melindy was intoxicated with the hope of seeing it. Especially she nursed a secret wish that she might have a glimpse of Renyon's Circus, a group of dancers, horsemen and gymnasts, who — Rastus told her — were performing that week in the little amphitheater.

"Dey's got a li'l gal no bigger'n you is," said he,

"who dances on horseback, M'lindy. What's dat? What *is* dat? Oh! Nothin' but de jasmine."

Through the trees there burst upon the sight a glowing, abundant mass of yellow swamp-jasmine, so wonderfully golden in the sun that Rastus drew rein to admire it.

His diplomatic soul moved him to gather some of it for Mrs. Winfield, who would require propitiation when the runaways returned.

Melindy chafed at the delay, but recognizing that darkness might prevent their finding this *cache* of gold on their homeward journey, descended too, and went into the swampy woods with Rastus.

Black Judge was tied to a tree.

Few negroes have any notion of the lapse or duration of time. Rastus and Melindy dallied over the jasmine, ever reaching for a larger spray, ever discarding one in hand for the chance of a better or fuller.

When, at length, the truants emerged from the wood, laden with the fragrant yellow festoons, both stood speechless with horrible fright.

Black Judge and the buggy had vanished!

"Oh-h-h!" wailed Rastus, "whar done come o' my horse'n buggy? Oh-h!—"

"Come on, Rastus, we'll find 'em," said dauntless little Melindy. "You know dat ole Jedge horse. He's so stuck-up and hifalutin', I reckon he jess pulled out and walked along."

But she spoke without confidence.

Sadly they tried to follow the tracks of hoofs and wheels. But the shell-road was the fashionable driveway of the town and tracks were multifold.

This, alas! was the unfashionable hour. No one passed who could give them help.

Rastus bewailed his fate and sobbed aloud with grief and fear.

Melindy, with terror-stricken eyes, watched the road, disdaining him in her soul.

After what seemed to be many miles of anguished search, darkness fell.

Melindy lifted her face to the heavens, smiled a beatific smile of relief and said quickly, five times over,

"Stah! Stah! Stah bright,
Ve'y first stah I sees tehnight,
I wush, I wush, I wush I might,
Git de wush I wush tehnight!"

Melindy's magic was more potent than Eulalia's, for at the moment that the charm was completed part of the wish came true.

Back from the road, under a wayside pecan tree, stood the horseless buggy!

Melindy rushed forward rejoicing; but there was no trace of the horse and Rastus raised his voice in lamentation.

"Whar's ma horse? Oh-h! Black Jedge dear, doan you hyeah yo' Rastus? What call had any pusson to come long and tuk ma lubly horse? Oh! Marse Winfield sho' will hab ma hide fo' dis. Oh! Land o' plenty!"

Melindy could stand his moans no longer.

"Shet up, yo' Rastus! Ain' you got no sense 'tall? Hollerin' and a-cryin' all over de road! Jess lissen teh me! Hyah comes some white folkses in a kerredge. You stop 'em an' tell 'em what a fool you is, and how-come Black Jedge done gone got stole. An' you git a seat by de coachman and foller up de thiefs ef you kin. Anyway you kin tell de p'leecemen at de Wes' End to hunt 'em. An' I'll stay hyah in de buggy and wait 'twell you come back."

"Oh! Melindy, I'se 'fraid teh tell dem white folkses I done let Jedge git stole. But — I — will! I will. Ain't *you* 'fraid to stay hyah by yo'se'f? Dey's ghostes in de swamps at night. You better let de buggy be and come 'long wif me!"

But plucky Melindy, partly for fear of losing the buggy as well as the horse, partly because she dreaded entering an atmosphere of blame more than she did the terrors of the woods, elected to remain. She rested in the shadow of the carriage while Rastus falteringly told his tale to the amazed "white folks," got his "lift" and drove away.

The night darkened. Strange rustlings, murmurs and the calls of hidden creatures quickened in the swamp. The child was suddenly overcome by a great flutter of dread. All her senses rose in panic. Every swaying vine, every bending branch reached arms for her.

"I suttinly does wish I'd let Sis Suky buy dat life insu'ance," she sighed despairingly.

But she had the reassuring knowledge that soon the drive would be thick with carriages. She had only to brave the loneliness a little longer.

So she sang to keep up her courage,

"Oh! Tek yo' time, Miss Lucy,
Miss Lucy, Lucy Long.
Oh! Tek yo' time, Miss Lucy.
Tek — yo'— time — Miss Lucy Long.
Ef she prove a scoldin' wife,
As sho' as she is born,
I'll tek her down teh Georgy,
An' trade her off fo' corn!
So'— tek yo' time, Miss Lucy, etc."

"Sh!" said Melindy to herself, for from across the narrow stream back of the railroad track on the other shore came a faint recognizing whinny.

Melindy leaped from the buggy like a flame.

Her twinkling feet scarcely touched the shell-road, — away she sped like the wind, down to the rickety wooden bridge, and like the wind across it. Lightly she ran in a whirl of excitement to the spot opposite the buggy on the other shore.

"Where are you gwine, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?
Where are you gwine, charming Billy?"

she sang.

Again the faint, distant whinny.

Melindy followed it into the darkened wood. Here the ground was firm and solid.

A sunken, trail-like path wound confusingly among the trees.

In an open space, vaguely discernible in the early moonlight, stood three rough men and Judge.

All four were pawing the ground nervously.

"Howdy!" said Melindy.

The men turned as on pivots.

"Who are you?" they exclaimed.

Melindy's sharp wits were thinking fast. The dramatic was the breath of life to her.

"I'se one o' de li'l gals dat dances on horseback at Renyon's Circus at de Wes' End," she said, "an' I'se done runned away. Please kin I stay hyah by you-all? I'se awful 'fraid ob de dark."

The men looked at her dubiously. She seemed a mite in the big darkness. One of them swore, one giggled.

"You say you know horses?" asked the third. Melindy nodded proudly.

"Well, go to that noisy brute and see if you can keep him quiet."

Melindy stood on tiptoe and patted Judge's satin nose with her satin finger-tips. He gave one little murmur of delight and was still.

"What do you think of that?" admired the horse-thieves and the three continued their interrupted whispered conversation. They withdrew still further from the child.

Silently her eager fingers untied the harness and released Judge from bondage. Silently her lithe, light body climbed a little tree and dropped upon his back.

Then vigorously she kicked him, holding by the mane.

"Home, Jedge, home! On, Jedge, home! Home! Go! Go!" she screamed.

The sensitive beast plunged forward. A shot went wild in the dark. The fastest black beauty in New Orleans crashed out of the woods, and down the track, over the bridge and up to a stately old barouche, the astonished occupants of which cried out at the sight of the lunging beast and the mad little daughter of the jockey.

A chastened Rastus brought Melindy home that night to the distressed and frightened friends in the Big White House.

All the children had "waited up" to see her.

Melindy was not chastened. She swelled with pride as she related to the amazed household the thrilling story of her heroic conduct. She omitted no exciting detail.

"An' dat was jess li'l me did dat," she would cry vaingloriously at intervals in the telling. "Ain't I brave, Miss Carrie?"

Miss Carrie laughed and sighed.

"Eulalia dear," she said, "next time be sure and tell *immediately* if Melindy goes away. Don't wait until we ask.

"I *have* to set guards," she said plaintively to Marse George. "You see, in spite of her pluck, of her real heroism in danger, she hasn't the slightest true conscience in the matter,— not the faintest sense

of having done wrong in the first place by going against orders. It is a puzzle," she added under her breath, "but I do not think negroes have any real moral recognitions."

But,—"Missy Eulalia, honey," Melindy was saying affectionately, "you is a real, good, true, honest li'l gal, you is, not to bear tales and tattles on Melindy."

CHAPTER V

SIGNS, OMENS AND PREDICTIONS

MELINDY'S "Miss Carrie" had this pretty custom. She saved in a silver box her long fair "combings," those shining strands of hair that broke off in comb or brush; and at the birds' nesting time she went about the garden placing them here and there on trees and bushes to be used as home-building material. Often she saw them again woven into the mocking birds' houses, once she found them glittering through the long, lovely pocket of the oriole, and on one occasion, happier than all the others, she thought she saw a golden thimble deep in the honeysuckle vine and discovered it to be a tiny nest of the humming birds, her gift throughout. The humming birds looked more than ever like jewels in the appropriate golden setting.

Melindy stood beside her mistress shaking her head in silent disapproval.

In most circumstances her Miss Carrie was infallible, but now she "sho'ly was mighty reckless."

Miss Carrie turned from the honeysuckle to meet the troubled gaze of the child. Melindy's bright eyes were of a softness so velvety and deep that it seemed as if one might stroke them with impunity and pleasure. When her usual twinkling laughter curved their

corners they were alluring; now as the long upraised lashes revealed troubled tragic depths, Miss Carrie paused to wonder at their sweet solemnity.

"What's the matter, Melindy?"

"Why, Miss Carrie, dear, doan' you *know* you'll hab de headache all yo' blessed life long ef you gib yo' hair to de birds teh lib wif? Yas'm, yas *ma'm*, Miss Carrie. I jess knows whar I'm a-tellin' you. You better mind out. I knowed a lady whar gave her hair to de birds to make nestes and her haid it ached an' ached worse an' worse, an' whole lots of her hair done fell out and she had teh buy new hair an' fasten it on her haid, Miss Carrie. An' dem ole birds, ebery time she come out unner de trees dey jess laughed fit ter kill, Miss Carrie.

"You better bleeve what I'm a-tellin', 'cause I done seen de boughten hair a-hangin' on a chair!"

Miss Carrie knew the futility of arguing down superstition with most negroes. The deep-rooted mysticism inherited from generations of fetish-worshiping ancestors was not easily to be removed by logic. But Melindy always seemed to her saner, more intelligent, more highly developed than others. Therefore she expostulated.

"Now, Melindy, child," she said reprovingly, "stop and think what you are saying. How can hair that is already out of my head and built into a birds' nest put pain inside my head? Isn't it silly to think that?"

Melindy smiled, but dubiously.

"Well'm," she said, "I doan' know *how* it kin do it. But I knows it *do* do it, Miss Carrie. Else how-come dat-ar lady's head done ache an' her hair done fell out?"

"Not because of the birds, I am sure."

"Yas'm. You knows. I guess dat's so," said the acquiescent one, and dropped the subject.

Not so Miss Carrie. Encouraged by her apparent victory she continued, "You must not be superstitious, Melindy. It's very foolish and ignorant and only people who have never been to school and won medals for proficiency, as you have, should be superstitious."

"Is I superstitious?" asked Melindy in awed tones, overwhelmed by the big word but reveling in it, "What's supstintious, Miss Carrie?"

Her mistress recognized the difficulties before her and sat down upon a garden bench to do the subject justice. She took her charge very seriously, considered these kindly, childish people more earnestly than did most of her neighbors, realizing that a race in its childhood is as important a ward to the adult races of the world as is a child to its adult guardians. It was in something of a missionary spirit that she planted these seeds in Melindy.

The child sat at her feet on the grass. She forgot to snap with her fingers the lapful of explosive seed-pods she had gathered from the love-pop vine for the purpose, as she looked at Miss Carrie adoringly, admiring the sheen of her hair, the fairness of her neck,

her tall lithe slenderness, the white softness of her summery gown.

But soon all other thoughts were lost in a great astonishment. What did she hear!

Miss Carrie said it was not true that walking under a ladder brought misfortune. It was not true that counting the buttons of a new frock made them drop off easily. It was not true that the bite of a negro with bluish gums was fatal. It was not dangerous to get a first sight of the new moon reflected in water. One's name could safely be spoken when turkey buzzards were flying low. The sudden little shiver that ran up your spine for no tangible cause,—" like as if ants wuz a-runnin' up yo' back,"— that did not imply that someone was walking over the site of your future grave. Could Miss Carrie mean that black cats following one did not predict good luck, or that spiders could be killed with impunity?

Here were heresies beyond belief.

But her mistress, hitherto infallible, distinctly disavowed the standing of these and other accredited portents. She said that credence in them belonged only to the ignorant, not to prize pupils like Melindy.

A new world seemed to open before the child, a world free from fear and ominous accident. The prospect of becoming superior to " ignorant niggers " was enchanting. The dimples flashed. And yet — and yet —

Melindy could not quite believe Miss Carrie's decree of iconoclasm. But neither could she quite doubt her

beloved guide, until now proved right in every point of knowledge or opinion.

On the surface, of course, she smiled the compliance that, with her, meant simply the amiable desire to comply without any special activity in that direction.

Miss Carrie was content. But when her triumphant mistress had gone into the house with garden shears and flowering sprays of honeysuckle, the compliant Melindy meditatively snapped her love-pop balls, shaking her head a little more doubtfully after each fusillade of seeds.

She was trying not to watch the direction of the ejected seeds to see where her fate lay. And as she popped the pods, the exercise of the physical habit made the accompanying mental habit more difficult to overcome.

Melindy wondered.

As she stood still in her perplexity, there came upon the air a shrill, familiar, trumpet sound.

"Oh!" cried Melindy aloud, "Dere's de bottleman. Come, chilluns, come!"

Just as the exploded seed-pods had shot forth seeds, so the white house shot forth children at the sound.

Eulalia came whirling out upon the terrace; down a porch pillar slid Eustace; out of a window dropped Peter. The baby and his "black Mammy" appeared in the door.

"Where is he? Where? Has he come to our house yet? Run, ask him to wait, Melinda, please!

Oh! Hurry up, Peter!" called the voices all at once.

The bottle-man blew his bugle again and all the houses in the neighborhood disgorged eager children laden with bottles,— from great, aristocratic green bottles with golden capes and collars and black French bottles with piratical red caps and vaselike Italian bottles riding in straw balloons, to the very plebeian white bottles and brown bottles marked Lemon Soda and Pop.

The bottle-man, a shining mahogany old gentleman, with cottony beard and hair around a tonsured poll, pushed forward a large three-wheeled barrow, full of bottles.

From two lateral poles there stretched across this chariot a leather riband hung with bells. These and the genial bottle-man's bugle made music wherever he went.

But he was no Pied Piper,— it was not the charm of the music that brought the eager children to his shrine.

When they had gathered close, the bottle-man slid out a drawer from under his barrow. A wonderful, maddening, tempting drawer it was, divided into small squares, and each square filled with delight. Marbles, tops, the tiniest of china dolls, paper dollies, enticing slips of decalcomania pictures that could be transferred to the paper and fly-leaves of books and even — by the unregenerate — to the backs of hands and to shirt bosoms. There was jewelry, so called, very

glittering. There were wee books for memoranda, brilliantly striped pencils, boxes of colored crayons, and uproariously gorgeous painted candy that every one's cruel family specifically forbade, decried and tabooed.

Some of these treasures, one bottle could buy; some took as many as five; in a smaller under-drawer there were a few very glorious desiderata costing even ten. Different bottles had varied purchasing power. Nanny's three pickle-jars could secure for her only two marbles or one ring, while Eustace with a couple of Burgundy carriers was a captain of finance.

"Hyah's some blue glass," said the bottle-man, "hyah's some cl'ar blue glass wif a purkle line. Ev'body knows, chilluns, dat blue glass wif a purkle line is a sho' 'nough cure an' charm.

"Has you got de rheumatiz?
Blue glass make you glad you is.
Has you got malaria slow?
Blue glass teach it how to go.
Has you got a ache or pain?
Blue glass send it home again.
Has you lost yo' money, honey?
Has you lost yo' money, honey?
Look th'ough blue glass when it's sunny,
Ef it's got a purkle line,
Blue glass fix you rich *an'* fine!

"Only three quart bottles, Missy 'Lalia!"

"I'm too big to believe in charms and magic, Uncle Ben; but I'd like some paper dollies, please," said Eulalia.

"Too big teh b'leeve in charms; — too — big!" snorted the bottle-man, "Huh! Melindy's bigger'n you is," he went on, "an' I guess she knows 'nough not teh to be so high-steppin'. Hyah you is,— blue glass, Melindy."

"Oh! Uncle Ben," Melindy said, "Miss Carrie jess 'spises charms. She jess done tole me dat only ign'ant niggers believes in 'em."

Uncle Ben scratched his head. He was too politic an old fellow to preach counter to the authorities; yet he was seriously alarmed at Miss Carrie's edict, seriously believed her message to be dangerous.

"Well — sah!" said he, "Maybe white folks kin let go ob magic, but niggers is got ter pertect theirselves. Lissen hyah. I'll tell you what dis berry same piece ob blue glass did fo' me.

"I had a big basket ob washin'— clothes done up by ma wife — to take home to her missus. An' 'twas too fur to walk an' carry dem. I'd been a trompin' all de day. An' I didn't hab but a nickel, an' I didn't think de conductor on de street car would let me ride wif ma big basket. So I jess slipped a li'l bit ob dis hyah blue glass in ma pocket fo' a caution.

"So.

"Well, sah, 'long came de man an axed me what I think dat-ar vehicle is — a express train?

"An I puts ma hand on de blue glass in ma pocket an' says, right spry, 'No, sah! 'cause, ef 'twas, maybe you'd express yo'self a li'l bit mo' politer.' An' ev'rybody laughed. But the conductor kep' on a-

badgerin' me. An' I kep' on a-answerin' him, but polite and quiet and good natured,— an' ma hand on de blue glass!

"At las' he los' his patience,—'count ob all de white folkses laughin' *wif* me an' *at* him, I reckon. Anyway, he jess plumb insisted I should git right off'n de car wif dat big bundle o' clothes. An' honey! What you think? Dat-ar exact spot is my crossin', whar I intended to git off de car anyways. An' in all de 'citement, dat-ar white man ain't nebber thought teh take ma nickel at all!

"Sholy blue glass is a charm!

"Well, want it, Melindy? All right. Three bottles fo' a big piece. So long! Dis hyah standin' an' makin' ma mouth work wif words an' talk will suttinly keep it empty ob meat an' potatoes. 'By, chilluns!"

"Keep a-steppin'," Melindy returned courteously.

She entered the kitchen, admiring the clean, sapphire luster of her reprehensible purchase.

In an instant her faith in the whole panoply of magic was restored.

For, "Shh! M'lindy," warned Suky, "walk gentle. Miss Carrie's got a headache!"

"Dem villain birds!" exclaimed Melindy. "I 'clar teh goodness," she added in exasperation, "white folks is too plumb know-it-all-ish fo' any use!"

"Isn't dat Miss Carrie's bell a-ringin'?" asked Suky.

Melindy ran upstairs to answer the summons.

Miss Carrie lay on a couch looking pale and tearful.

"What do you wish, Melindy?"

"Didn't you ring, Miss Carrie, honey? We thought we done heard you ring yo' bell. Dat's how-come I come teh come up. I'se sorry you is sick, Miss Carrie." Nobly refraining from an I-told-you-so of triumph, Melindy bided her time, and departed on tiptoe.

Poor Miss Carrie's sudden headache had a deeper significance than appeared even to Melindy.

Among other beautiful old-world keepsakes in a charming little legacy bequeathed to her by a beloved uncle, was a quaint brooch of diamonds and garnets, — two hearts, a white one and a red, crowned with a coronet of laurel leaves. This she was to possess until the twenty-first birthday of Cousin Nathalie, the testator's young daughter, whose mother had received it from him when she turned twenty-one.

As Nathalie was expected home to them in a very few weeks to celebrate her graduation from a northern college and her turning into the twenties, Miss Carrie had, very tenderly and happily, been cleansing the brooch that morning. Something had called her from the task, and she had temporarily forgotten it. Incomprehensibly she had forgotten it, for she was a careful person.

Now she could not find the ornament!

Plumbers had been in the house; the gas-man had come to test the pipes,— but she could not bring herself to view them with suspicion. Her own servants

were above the possibility of it. Still,— the room had been wildly upturned. There was no sign of Cousin Nathalie's heirloom.

Poor Miss Carrie took to her couch, overcome by a nervous headache and the effort to refrain from tears.

Melindy went soberly down to the kitchen.

"Now's de time teh sing some ob yo' mournful music, Sis," she said, "'cause Miss Carrie's done been lettin' de birds hab her hair and dis hyah headache's done come teh *stay*. Hesh up, you Mr. Mockin' Bird, shet-up yo' squawkin'! Puttin' yo' haid round dis side an' dat side like-a you was a lady. You done done 'nough harm 'round hyah. Shet up or I'll shet you up. Doan' you come singin' at me. I don't care how pretty you sings. 'Cause all you is sayin' is, 'We fixed 'er, we fixed 'er!'"

Melindy leaned forward to shake her brown fists belligerently, and the bright blue glass fell out of the apron pocket.

"Glory! glory!" she shouted. "Come 'long an' rejoice! I shorely will fix *you* now!"

She darted first to the accessible humming bird's nest in the honeysuckle vine and flashed the blue charm upon it.

"*Dar* now, you'se done for, Mr. Li'l Bit ob Nothin'!"

She climbed every climbable tree, looking for nests, and focused that blue glass upon each one that she found and upon every bird that swung on a branch,

hopped on the lawn, or flew across the sky. She divided the hedge and parted the long grasses for such foolhardy feathered folk as built close to the earth. Five times she rounded the high trees beyond her power to climb. Under the oriole's pendant home she stood and sang,—

> Go 'way, go 'way, you li'l red witch,
> Melindy doan' want none ob sich.

But the big, saucy, gay mocking bird had built so high in the magnolia tree that Melindy feared her glass's power would not reach him.

Jacques, the gardener, came by with his ladder.

"Uncle Jacques," wheedled Melindy, "isn't I a good li'l gal an' doan' nebber tech no fruits or berries widout axin' fo' 'em, since dat time we-all got de awful pains frum eatin' de Japan plums we stole?" — she dimpled roguishly —"Oh! you does lub me, Uncle Jacky, I knows you does, 'cause you an' me, we's so pleasant. An' I wouldn't pull hard at de rose bushes ner step on de ground-pinks fer *nothin'*, I wouldn't."

Old Jacques laughed.

"Well, li'l beggar an' cajoler, what d'ye want ob ole Jacky now?"

Melindy told to his perfect sympathy the tale of their mistress' reckless folly and its punishment.

"So climb up teh dat rapscallion mocking bird's nest, please, sah, an' flash dis blue glass on it fo' me," urged Melindy.

Jacques loved Miss Carrie dearly and Melindy too; he had full faith in the ascribed source of the evil headaches and in the possibility of their cure by exorcism. Right willingly he mounted the tall ladder to the lowest branches of the great tree and thence climbed to giddy heights, until he reached Sir Saucy's nest.

"Fo' de land's sake!" he called out. "Fo' de land's sake! Why! What! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"What is it? What is it?" cried Melindy, dancing up and down, beyond control with curiosity.

Slowly the careful Jacques descended to her, his mouth wide open in astonishment. Speechless he advanced, the blue glass charm and Miss Nathalie's heart-shaped brooch in one extended palm.

"The wicked li'l thief!" cried the child. She recognized the pin, which Miss Carrie always wore with a little ceremony on the birthday of the aunt whose lover's gift it had been.

Melindy darted wildly up the stairs, forgetting her mistress' headache in her excitement and less delicate of it now that the black magic that had caused it was well conquered.

"Looky hyah, Miss Carrie! Looky hyah!"

Miss Carrie sprang to her feet in joy.

"Melindy, my *dear!* Oh! Thank you! Thank you! Where did you find it?"

Melindy told her, not sparing in the slightest the feelings or reputation of the mocking bird. She confessed,— nay, boasted — of the blue glass too, and

assured Miss Carrie grandly that she was entirely wrong to disregard omens.

"Sho'ly, Miss Carrie, honey," she vaunted, "I'd rather be sup'stitious an' *well* than so-all-powerful educated an' hab headaches."

Miss Carrie laughed through happy tears.

"I remember now," she said, "I dropped the brooch into the silver hair-box instead of the jewel casket on the same dressing-table. Why, I must have literally thrown it out from the gable window into the branches of the magnolia!"

"Well'm, I got it erway from dat-ar pesky bird. Me an' Jacky."

"Dear child, you did. There is *some* magic worth belief, Melindy. Loving service is truly strong white magic."

Melindy went singing down the stairs, jubilant, with a pretty little new gold breastpin on her blue gingham apron,—"wif a real pearl into it,"— and a crisp five-dollar bill for Jacques.

Half-way down, she stopped and called to Miss Carrie, who smiled upon her from the landing.

"Miss Carrie, honey, *darlin'*," she pled, "you ain't a gwine-a put no mo' hairs out fo' de birdses, is you?"

"Well,— not this spring, Melindy."

"Miss Carrie, honey, *darlin'*, darlin', doan' you b'lieve *yet* dat de birds done did de harm?"

"No, Melindy, child; not yet."

"Well," commented Melindy to herself,— too

proud of her own powers, too pleased with Miss Carrie's present safety to grieve very much for next year's dangers —" well, white folks is got a good heart, but dey's got a mighty weak mind."

CHAPTER VI

CUPID IN CALICO

THE day that Miss Nathalie was to arrive dawned glowingly, and with it the household glowed in heart and in appearance.

Soft masses of Miss Nathalie's favorite crepe myrtle blooms filled baskets and bowls on porches, in salons, chambers and halls. Prudentia, Miss Nathalie's favorite mare, was combed and clipped and decked with ribbons. The boys wore the white and blue midshipmite suits that Miss Nathalie loved; the baby's hair was brushed into "feathers," as Miss Nathalie called the floating, fairy-like down; Eulalia's chubby elbows and shoulders were bare, showing the dimples that Cousin Nathalie always measured with her little finger tip, and Suky was busy making "de goodies dat our Miss Nathalie's done lubbed ever sence she come hyah a teeny weeny li'l baby, always a-lookin' ober her shoulder teh see ef she warn't bein' called back teh Hebben, po' lamb!"

For the orphan cousin was indeed the beloved daughter of the house.

Melindy, in her starched guinea-blue calico frock and much fluted white apron, came running to Miss Carrie,

"Deary me!" she cried excitedly, "dat-ar no-'count milkman ain't brung Miss Nathalie's buttermilk fer her lunch. Suky done lef' a note out fo' him dis mo'nin' teh leave de buttermilk an' he ain't lef' nothin' but dis-hyah cyard."

She handed to her mistress a small placard which read:

Know
Butter
Milk
Now
Bring U Sum on 2th Tripp.

"Well, never mind, Melindy. He hadn't any this morning. You see, he says he'll bring some on his second trip."

"Oh, he will, will he? How Miss Nat'lie gwine-a hab her buttermilk fo' her lunch den? Miss Nat'lie alluz has buttermilk an' beaten biscuit fo' her lunch when she comes home from college. An' I isn't gwine-a set hyah an' see no no-'count nigger milkman wif li'l ole grizzled whiskers takin' 'vantage ob ma Miss Nat'lie, Miss Carrie.

"Miss Carrie, honey, lemme hab a pail an' take de cyar an' go up teh Nappyoleon Avenoo teh de li'l dairy place an' git some buttermilk. Den Miss Nat'lie'll say, 'Oh! Hyah's ma buttermilk!' An' you'll say, 'Melindy done got it fo' you'; an' she'll say, 'Ain't dat jess smart ob Melindy!' Please'm, Miss Carrie."

As Miss Carrie's laugh gave consent, Melindy darted back for her pail and started down the shady brick sidewalk toward the car tracks.

On the next block she stopped before a modest gray cottage set in an exquisite garden of pale-toned blossoms and the gentle green of ferns.

A frail, small old gentleman with a military tread was marching briskly along the path. His face was sternly lined but very fine and sensitive and his skin was as pure and delicate as his morning-glories.

"Good morning, Gin'al," said Melindy politely.

The General flashed her a bayonet of a glance from beneath a forbidding fortress of beetling brows and proceeded on his walk in silence.

"Good mo'ning, Gin'al Hav'land, sah," drawled Melindy with great sweetness.

"What do you want?" shot forth the General, coming to a halt.

"I doan' want nothin', sah," said Melindy in her light, wheedling, ingratiating minor tones, "I doan' *want* nothin', sah. I'se a-*givin*' you good-mo'nin'."

The General smiled that quick, rare, beautiful transformation by which an infrequent smile glorifies the faces of the somber.

Melindy had the key to the citadel of his severity.

"Good morning, Imp," said the General. "Now be off with you!"

But, "Yo' sweet peas is much han'somer den ourn," pursued Melindy. "You suttinly has a gifted han' at flowers, Gin'al."

The flattered General, touched upon his weakest vanity, looked about him complacently.

"I done tole Miss Carrie dis very mo'ning dat yourn was better den our sweet peas; but she say dey warn't at all. Wush she'd jess come hyah an' *see* yourn," sighed Melindy.

The General flushed and paled. Then, "When you come by here on your way back from where you're going, Imp, stop and I'll send your mistress some," he said.

"Poor Caroline," he added under his breath, "it was no fault of *hers*."

"Thanky, sah, Gin'al! Thanky, sah!" smiled Melindy. And little the General knew how great was her secret triumph.

For on the preceding evening, Miss Carrie, regardless of Melindy, who was removing the flower vases, had read aloud to Marse George this extract from Miss Nathalie's last letter:

"Glorious family, I'm coming home to you. It just nearly killed me that George couldn't leave his clients to bring you all to Commencement. But here we all are now together! Please don't come to meet me, but be all at home and have all my pet notions obeyed for me when I come,— crepe myrtle, middy suits, Euly's dimples, blessed old Prudentia decked for the fair, baby feathered, you two holding hands, Melindy stiff with starch, all the rest of the darkies

in a happy row, *such* smells from the kitchen! Oh, joy! Carolina mea, mother-cousin!

"Ah, me! Everything old-timey but the General's flowers! If he won't send them, honey, can't you *steal* some flowers from his garden? It seems as if I *must* have the General's posy when I come home. Poor old darling!"

"Hum!" chuckled Melindy as she entered the big home-gate with her pail of buttermilk and her posy of sweet peas, "Hum, hyah's yo' flowers when you come fo' dem, Miss Nat'lie, honey. *To* be sho', Gin'al Hav'land didn' know you was a-comin' home teh-day. But,— I didn' hab teh *stole* dem, neider."

Melindy did not know the story of the alienation of the General. But she did know that on other summers he had stood with the family to greet "our lass," as he called Miss Nathalie, when she came home from college, and that one of her glad kisses had always been for him.

Throughout the year just past, Melindy had missed his once-frequent visists, had noticed the shadow of regretful perplexity upon Miss Carrie's face when his name was spoken, and had wondered at his crotchety unwillingness to be civil to her,— to Melindy, usually so welcome to every one.

One day, Marse George had come home and announced in tones half sorry, half indignant, "Well, dear, I tried to call upon the General to-day, and he

spoke to me cordially enough,— over the gate, but failed to ask me into the garden. I've done all I can, I suppose. If only children wouldn't grow up so fast these things would not happen."

Melindy often wondered how the fact that youth matured with years had antagonized the General, but set the reason down in her mind to "some ob de white folkses ructions" and dismissed it.

Soon after Melindy's return with the milk and flowers, a great shout went up from the two boys perched on the gate posts as lookouts.

Eulalia cried, "Mother! Father! She's coming!"

All the household rushed to the garden. There were Suky with wet dough on her round brown arms, Lewis leading Prudentia, Mammy carrying Baby, Jacques laden with crepe myrtle boughs, the housemaids grinning with delight and Melindy dancing gleefully.

The master and mistress stood in the great doorway, eyes brimming with joy, and the three children rushed out upon the sidewalk, watching the approaching carriage.

As the two bays dashed up the street, smiling neighbors called and waved from windows and porches.

It was a true triumphal entry. For the slim girl who stood up in the old barouche to wave in response was a real Queen of Love to her friends.

In a moment, Nathalie was home.

"We was so glad teh see Miss Nat'lie," Melindy

said afterward to her friends, the Twinses, "dat I dunno how we 'uns ever stood ourselves all dis time widout 'er. It suttinly tasted better'n mint lemonade to see Miss Nat'lie home again. An' ev'ybody kissed her dat warn't shakin' her hand and ev'ybody cried but Miss Nat'lie. Ou' Miss Nat'lie cayn't cry; her face won't work dat-ar way. She jess laughed and kep' a-sayin', 'Home! Home!' an' "— here Melindy paused impressively,—" you see *me*. She done kissed me, Twinses, right smack on ma north cheek."

For having been taught in school that to one facing the sunrise, north would be on the left, Melindy displayed her education by using the terms interchangeably.

By noontime, except for the atmosphere of fresh happiness and the children's eager curiosity in anticipation of the contents of Cousin Nathalie's trunk, the household had quieted.

"This is the only hard place in the homecoming," Nathalie was saying, as she and Miss Carrie passed Melindy holding open the dining-room door for them, "to go to luncheon and miss my General's pale posy on my plate. Why — Caroline! Did he — *did* he send them?"

Miss Carrie with unerring instinct turned inquiringly to the proud Melindy.

"Yas'm," said that small adjuster of destinies, "yas'm, Miss Nat'lie, I done went to fotch yo' buttermilk,—'twas me done fetched you dis hyah good buttermilk, Miss Nat'lie — an' de Gin'al he done

picked dis-ar bookay an' gi'n it teh me for you-all on ma way home."

"Is it possible? Is it possible, George?" cried Nathalie. "Melindy, you're a double darling and I'm the happiest girl in New Orleans. I shall go to see my General this evening. Bless his dear old heart!"

Intermingling with the praises of Suky's wonderful luncheon went a chant of delight at the General's apparent forgiveness and Melindy's successful embassy.

That small person perceived that there was some misconception as to the voluntariness of the General's offering and as to the person for whom the present was intended. But "I always says," thought she, "when folks is happy, doan' disturb 'em. When de milk is a-turnin' teh clabber, *let* it clabber. Cayn't nebber git sweet agin an' stirrin' will only spile it."

So, deceived and happy, Miss Nathalie finished her luncheon and went with Miss Carrie for a "chatter" in the cool shade of the arbor.

"Cousin Caroline," she said, "I suppose you and George have often wondered just what injured the General's love for me. It seemed too intimate a thing to write — almost too much other folks' secrets to talk about. No, dear! Don't say I need not tell it. I've decided that you and George ought to know. Your ignorance is grim and mysterious and not nice and folksy at all.

"Well, this is the Tale of the Fair Princess, the Old Knight and the Two Brothers.

"You know how I've spent most of my life on the General's knee, hearing how much I am like my beautiful mother,"— Nathalie paused in pensive reverence, for her beautiful mother was only a beautiful dream to her. But Miss Carrie's eyes filled with a keener memory, for the lass before her was exactly like another lass who had been an elder sister to her childhood.

"And, of course," pursued the soft Southern voice with its cultured unprovincial accent, "of course, the General's nephews, like sons to him, have just been brothers to me."

"Except Gerald?" teased Miss Carrie.

"I'm coming to that. I'm *perfectly* frank, Caroline," opening wide the honest mouse-gray eyes. "Except, as we got older Gerald began sweethearting. And I hadn't any sweethearts,— then," roguishly, "and I did like it. And sometimes I thought even Robert,— but he was older and more serious,— so it sort of *developed* to Gerald. Those things just *happen*, those young things do."

Miss Carrie laughed and put her hand affectionately on the light brown coils of hair. "Wisdom they teach in our colleges," said she.

But the young face was sober now with a gentle gravity.

"Now comes the hard part," continued Nathalie, "I've truly cried a heap over this part,— a regular real romance," she smiled. "Yes'm, many a night I sighed for thy bosom and envied every heroine

in the French plays her consoling and flattering *confidante.*

"Gerald and I," she went on gravely, "just outgrew each other,— or I thought so. He did read me *so* much well-known poetry and sang me so many tenor songs and was so *very* fond of corners and got so mad when I couldn't rave over the comfortable commonplace houses he's getting so rich designing! He *is* such a dear boy, and I do love him, but the champagne all went out of it. I just got older. Don't laugh. Twenty is ages older than seventeen.

"I truly thought Gerald outgrew me too. He said I shouldn't study sociology and that unsophisticated women were sweeter. And he was intensely attentive to Agostine Du Fossat all one season and he knew I knew it and didn't care. So I thought it was just over with Gerald, and I could love him brotherly, same as ever.

"But, here's the truth of it. The more I met other men,— yes, I did meet plenty these last two years, summer resorts and all, the more I met other men,— I hope you'll understand," the sweet voice deepened, "the more I realized that I had loved *Robert* all my life. I do, Cousin Caroline. There's no help for me. I just do.

"He had been such a quiet boy with so little glamour and no parlor tricks like Gerald, and the General never pushed him forward; he wasn't handsome and graceful and showy. I suppose I just ac-

cepted Robert as a — background to my life — and didn't know it.

"And studying to be a doctor is so absorbing, and being one is so exclusive of other things, Robert hasn't had time to *see* me since I grew up. He wasn't in any of the moonlight sails and the parties.

"But one day, it *bloomed*. In me, I mean. For good and all. I'm a goner, honey.

"Well,— last summer the General and I were having a confidential time — you know, about my mother — and I had just had a foolish week of imagining Robert cared for me — when suddenly General Haviland asked me, 'Lassie, do you love our lad?' And I thought he'd read my secret about Robert and I said 'Yes!'

"And — you see, I can laugh at it — I'd no sooner gotten back to college than North came *Gerald* and said he'd given up hope, but his uncle had assured him he need not and would I please! He was so sure, Cousin Caroline. And how could I say I'd meant Rob?

"So Gerald went home and wrote me a boyish letter that made me so sorry, for the old days' sake. And the General sent a stiff little note saying he preferred to believe he had misunderstood me rather than to think me capricious or a coquette — me a coquette, Cousin Carrie!" The straight, true glance, incapable of guile, was its own defender. "But he said perhaps we had best forget the old times in order not to hurt them by the present.

"Now, could I write to him and say: Dear Sir,— It was the other nephew that I ordered. Please exchange? Especially when Robert isn't a bit in love with me except sort of cousinly!

"So here we are. I could do without really pining about Rob. You know the bitter-sweet pain the poets sing! And, besides, it's good fun to love a man so fine and earnest, especially when you don't in the *least* mind being unmarried forever. But, oh! how I grieve over the General! For I knew he had loved and trusted me so.

"But he sent me the flowers to-day,— he did, he did! And I shall see him to-night. I'll just say, 'Try to trust me, dear; I can't explain.' And I'll wear pale yellow as Mother used. I'll fetch him."

Meanwhile Melindy was bent beneath the weight, not of conscience, but of the pressing fear of detection.

"Da's de way 'tis," she grumbled, "da's de way 'tis. I nebber ought teh hab de li'l sense teh go lingerin' 'round folkses qua'ls. But I did so want Miss Nat'lie teh be happy tehday. Whatfo' she hab teh go runnin' teh de Gin'al's house lickety-split dis ebenin' soon's she come home? Some folks is jess made outen hop-about. Dey ain't got no stay-a-li'l-while anywhars in dem.

"Glo'y be! It's think-right-spry or sit-an'-cry fo' me."

Soon a cheerful solution suggested itself to her and cleared away her fears.

"Oh, goody! I is smart. I'll jess do dat. I'll go ax de Gin'al — he likes me so much — I'll jess go dis hyah ebenin' an' ax de Gin'al please, sah, teh he'p me out er dis hyah mix-up."

The General had seen the horses bearing his lassie to her home. It had been a hard day for him. And the hardest part was to follow. For his boys would soon be home and he and Robert would have to speak to Gerald of Nathalie.

The grim old warrior's unhappy love-story had given a singularly romantic turn to his thought. In his mind Gerald, whose lighter fancy bore no resemblance to his uncle's lifelong constancy, suffered his own old pain and shone by the light of it.

General Haviland's boys came home. The jubilant young architect, beaming with delight, because of a new and promising contract won by him over the heads of older men, ran up the cottage steps, calling, "Uncle, Uncle! I've won. I've beaten 'em all!"

The weary young surgeon, just returned from a critical day's hard work, held out his hand to grasp the sympathetic uncle's and said quietly, "My diagnosis was correct, sir. She will live."

The General relaxed his firm clasp of Robert's hand to place his own tenderly on Gerald's shoulder as he said, "Boys, our lass came home to-day."

Gerald started. "She'd better not come tangling me up again," he said, in tones of serio-comedy.

"I think I see her coming now," said Robert, who had moved to the window.

"Coming — here?" gasped the General, paling.

"I cannot tell yet, sir. How well —"

Up the steps dashed Melindy, her blue calico crackling with her haste.

"Gin'al Hav'land!" she called imploringly. "*Dahlin'* Gin'al Hav'land!"

"Why, what on earth's the matter, Imp?"

"Gin'al, dear. Doan' tell on me, please, sah! Doan' go tellin' on me! Dem sweet peas! Miss Nat'lie done wrote teh Miss Carrie dat she jess couldn' seem teh come home widout yo' sweet peas a-waitin' fo' her, an' wouldn' we please teh *stole* some from you. But I knowed you was *so* kind an' good I jess wouldn' *stole* from you, 'cause you'se always *so* pleasant. So I jess come by hyah dis mo'nin' an' got you to gib me some fo' Miss Nat'lie fo' lunch, Gin'al, an' she thinks you sont 'em to 'er. An' now she's comin'— you kin see her down de street a-talkin' teh de Stevenses — now she's comin' teh thank you. Oh! Gin'al, dear, ef you doan' tell on me I won't tell how you done cried dat day when I showed you her graduation picture and you said you'd skin me alive ef I tole. *Please*, sah!"

Was it anger or only glad relief that turned the General sharp around on his heel and brought his handkerchief from his pocket.

But he turned back quickly, laughing, "Imp! Imp! Imp!" just as the lithe girl in lightest yellow appeared in the doorway and held out her two firm young hands to him.

A ray of late sunshine lit up her brown hair and put a light into the yellow muslin.

It was the living replica of a picture he had so clearly remembered all his life.

"My girl!" he cried, "Nathalie!" and took her to his heart.

"I came to thank you for my dear, dear flowers," she said.

At that, the General chuckled and Melindy trembled while the boys welcomed their old playmate, Gerald rather sentimentally but without embarrassment, Robert with a glad simplicity.

Then the perfidious General merrily explained the true source and history of the peacemaking posy. But Melindy, by that trick which the gods always worked for her, found herself not the culprit but the heroine of the day.

"I done got ti'ed of dis hyah not comin' teh yeach yuther's houses no mo'," said she, "an' I done put a stop right to it. Ain't I been cunnin'?"

"Cunning enough, Imp," replied the joyous General. "Run, Gerald, and ask George and Carrie and all the babies to come here for the evening. We'll have some songs,— eh, lass? Cunning enough, Imp," he repeated to Melindy when Gerald had gone, "but suppose we had not forgiven you for fooling us, eh? What then?"

"Oh, you would, you sho'ly would," dimpled the irresistible Melindy. "Everybody always forgibs me, 'cause I doan' mean no hahm. An' Miss Nat'lie

sho'ly, sho'ly hab teh forgib me atter she done kissed ev'y single sweet pea and held 'em all clost teh her heaht all de way up de stairs and kissed 'em some more when she done sot dem up all around Marse Robert's picture —"

"Melindy!" cried Nathalie aghast.

"Around Robert's picture!" exclaimed the bewildered General, taken off his guard.

And then for an awful moment there was silence.

Nathalie, too honest to deny, bit her lip and looked at the General.

Dr. Robert, very white, came to the rescue.

"Thank you, Nathalie," he said with tremulous fluency, "that was a pretty compliment."

But the direct General was too deeply moved to relieve the situation by light amenities.

"Robert's! You thought I meant — My dear lass," his voice faltered, "forgive me."

"But den"— according to Melindy's later report to Suky —"Missy Nat'lie ain't said nothin', only jess stood lookin' down, gittin' pink an' white an' white an' pink an' mos' ready teh cry — only she cayn't cry — an' I saw Marse Robert look sharp at her a minute an' his chest kep' a risin' up an' down lak a pigeon. Den he say teh me, 'Melindy,' he say, 'Gawd made you!'

"When he say dat, Miss Nat'lie lif' her haid quick an' look at Marse Rob. An' de two of 'em stand dere jess a-starin' at one 'nudder and lookin' in dey eyes lak rainbows an' grace-befo'-meat.

"'Nat'lie!' say de Gin'al.

"But dey ain't move.

"'*My* Nat'lie!' say de Gin'al.

"And teh dat Marse Rob shook his haid lak 'No,' a li'l, li'l bit an' smiled.

"An' Miss Nat'lie laughed.

"An' all de folkses come in.

"An' dat-ar blessed night Marse Rob gib me a whole five dollars, a golden one, for lyin' 'bout de Gin'al's sweet peas and talkin' too much 'bout ma betters. So I reckon *he's* plum crazy."

CHAPTER VII

THE BOY FROM BACK OF TOWN

MELINDY's gentle soul was seldom ruffled by angry passions. In every soft glance of her velvet eyes, in every twinkling dimple, every gentle intonation of her voice, amiability was apparent.

When an infrequent burst of temper did overtake her it passed like a summer thunder shower, leaving the landscape sunnier and sweeter for its bath of tears.

Only towards the Boy from Back o' Town, Melindy nursed a deep and changeless hatred.

Negroes in New Orleans seldom indicate directions by the points of the compass. "Up-town," "down-town," "by de ribber" and "back o' town," or "by de woods" serve instead.

"By de ribber" and "back o' town," as might be expected, the rougher elements of the population have their abode.

Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche was the name by which the Boy from Back o' Town was known. It was an eclectic name, chosen from among those of many ex-employers of his father, whose own name was "Uncle" or "Unc'" Jasper Robinson.

"Edwin Halley Osbo'ne La Rouche!" Melindy *ridiculed* scornfully, addressing Miss Eulalia.

"Missy Euly, honey, is dat any kind ob name fo' a niggah? Answer me dat now."

"Well, Melindy, you see," said little Eulalia, "some people has got funny names. I know a bull-dog named *Clover* and he doesn't look a least bit like a clover. Not a least bit, Melindy."

Melindy grunted. "Well, Missy, dat-ar bulldog ain' got nothin' teh say 'bout whar he name is. But dis-hyah back-o'-towner done *choose* he name. Ole presumtitious rapscallion!"

Eulalia opened her blue eyes wide. "Don't say swears, Melindy. I think it would be fun to choose your own name. I'd choose Flossie Belle or maybe Black-eyed Susan."

"I'd choose Melindy. Das de pretties' name dey is," declared that self-satisfied young person.

"But dat-ar back-o'-towner, his name ought teh be *jail-bird* an' so 'twill, ef he doan' look out fo' hisself. So stuck-up 'caze he's yaller."

"Let's go get pomegranates," suggested the pacific Eulalia, anxious to change the unpleasant topic. But Melindy's mood was not easily to be diverted.

"All right," she agreed, "but lemme tell you whar he done done, Missy Euly.

"First time he come along hyah wif Uncle Jasper Robi'son, a-walkin' a li'l bit behead or a li'l bit behine, a-runnin' along or a-pokin' along, an' Uncle Jasper Robi'son was sellin' veg'tables an' he had 'em in a li'l wagon an' he was a singin' out — Uncle Jasper was,"— here Melindy dramatically deepened

her voice and made a facial contortion supposed to be masculine and imitated the swinging cadences,

'Beets, ónions an' córn
Cucumbers an' símlin's
Yáms an' tomáties
An' I'ish patáties an'
Cábbage gréens.
All I háve
One hálf-a-pint-a mílk
Lef' óver
An' óne watermíllyon.'

"An' 'cross de street was a big black bar-footed woman wif a basket on her haid, singin' out,

'Black-bayries!
Black-bayries!
Hyah y'are!
Ripe Black-bayries!'

"An' dis bad boy, ebery time dat 'ooman call out, he jess shriek so nobody couldn' make out haid from tail whar she talkin' about. But ebery time he daddy call out dat boy shet up."

"That *was* very naughty," agreed Eulalia.

"Yas'm. An' I jess couldn' abide de sight ob dat boy. He jess pizened ma eyes. So I went out an' call 'im, and he done thunk I wanted teh buy somefin'; but I jess say, 'You stop yo' nonsense, boy!'

"An' he say, 'Will you be ma sweetheart ef I does?'

"An' I say, 'What call you got to ax me dat-ar?

G'long whar you gwine, an' behave yo'se'f. You isn' no gempman."

"An' he say, 'I doan' want-a be no gempman. I wants teh be a rounder. I wants teh be a back-o'-towner. You'll marry me yit, gal.'

"Das de first time I seen him.

"An', den, one day I'se a-gwine-a school, an' I had ma lunch in a li'l basket, an' de basket ain' got no top, 'cause I done jess natchelly broke up de top o' dat basket, an' dat boy runned inteh me runnin' round a corner an' two hahd-boiled aigs jump' out ma basket, an' he pick 'em up an' run off wif 'em an' he say, 'Thank you, ma'm!' teh me. An' I say, 'I'se been a-wushin' I'd meet some po' beggah boy teh gib dem aigs teh,' an' he laugh fit teh kill."

"Oh!" sympathized Eulalia.

"Yas'm. An' next time I seen him, 'twas Sunday. And I was all dress up so pretty an' walkin' 'long wif Remus an' Ramus. I was all duded up in pretty pink ribbons dat Miss Nat'lie done sont me. An' I done gave one ob dem great big pink bows teh Remus an' she done tied it on her teeny li'l pigtail dat stan's up so straight on her haid. An' I done gave one great big pink bow teh Ramus fer a necktie. An' we was all walkin' so high an' spry an' 'long come dat back-o'-town boy. An' he say,—he got a awful gross voice,—he say, 'Lan' sakes! Mus' been a cheap sale ob pink ribbon somewhar!' An' I say, 'Pity dey doan' sell sassiness too, 'stead ob *givin'* it

away!' But I jess wanted teh cry. I was so plum outdone. An' Remus an' Ramus, dey did cry de whole way home. I suttinly wush de debbil come scare de life outen dat boy!

"An' de wust ob it is, I'se got-a go teh-day an' tek a note teh Miss Du Fossat, an' dat boy's ma works fo' de Du Fossats. An' I jess doan' want-a see him."

This was a great tribute to her tormentor's success in mischief, for the generous Du Fossats owned a famous fig orchard wherein Melindy delighted.

"Dey's lots ob fig-trees," she used to say, "but de Du Fossats, dey got dese-ar great big purkle sugar figses dat's jess put dar teh show de res' ob de fig-trees whar kin be did ef dey tries."

Furthermore, this delectable garden was "'way down-town," in the old French part of the city, truly another world from that to which Melindy was used, a world of still, crumbling stateliness, paved courts and interior garden-squares, of broad flagged avenues edged with once-splendid mansions, and narrow-twisted brick lanes flanked by little houses made like two boxes, a smaller set back on a larger, and trimmed by dingy balustrades,— a world of rusty iron gate-ways and heavy window-blinds.

Usually the novelty of these surroundings, and the strange little children who spoke only French or a pretty patois of French-English, so interested Melindy that a visit to Miss Agostine's was a treat indeed.

But now!—"Well," she sighed, "mebbe dat back-o'-towner will be off peddlin' wif his daddy."

But — alas! — Melindy soon saw Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche standing with hands in his pockets and a general swaggering air of importance before a little fruit-stand on a street corner.

"Miss Agostine done sont me hyah, fo' a water-millyon," he was saying to the Italian proprietor, "because I'se a good jedge ob millyons. Ma daddy's a millyonere too. Now, dat one ain' no good at all. Plug up anudder one, please, sah."

Venders in New Orleans have a large-spirited custom, in order to satisfy the prospective purchaser, of carving a triangular wedge or plug out of any melon he may designate and from that cutting a bit for him to taste.

When he of the long name and short conscience had tasted and rejected two very excellent melons and demanded a third for trial, the guileless Italian at last saw a light and railed upon him in a fiery stream of Tuscan which was to Edwin not the least enjoyable part of the adventure.

Melindy passed by in fine scorn.

But Edwin hailed her, "Oh! Dere goes ma gal!" he called.

She took to her light heels. But the boy's long stride overtook her, and, "Whar did you git dem pretty shoes?" he shouted close to her elbow.

Ah! cry "Touchée!" Succumb, Melindy, for the unguarded spot in your character is pierced.

Melindy smiled a little dubiously and still without good-will, but stopped and answered,

"Ain' dem pretty? My Miss Nat'lie done come f'um Noo York an' I done got dese hyah new shoes speshul fo' teh wear when she come home. Ma Sis Suky's got new shoes too."

"Huh! She ain' got pretty li'l feetses lak yourn. She's got canal-boats."

Melindy flared. She liked the compliment but was too loyal to let the insult pass.

"Ain'! She's got *Spanish* feet, Suky is."

"What's dat you said?"

"Yassir," proudly, "ma Sis Suky's got Spanish feet, cause de shoe-store man done say so. Ma Sis didn' want-a tek a par shoes 'cause dey hurted her. But de shoe-store man he say, '*Oh!* YES! you kin wear dem-ar shoes; dey's mos' becomin' teh yo' feet, —'cause you is got li'l feet wif a high instep. You'se got one er dese hyah regular Spanish feet, you is.'

"So ma Sis say teh me, 'Das a compliment, Melindy.'

"So I say to Sis, 'Yas'm, das a compliment,' an' I say to de shoe-store man, 'Only one trouble 'bout it. Dat-ar mos' becomin' shoe is about two sizes too small fo' ma Sis, an' dat-ar pretty Spanish foot is got a niggah bunion on it.' So Suky didn' buy dem shoes. But she is got pretty feet, Suky is,"— with a return of animosity. "Go 'long, boy!"

"Which way is you gwine, Melindy?"

"Which way is *you* gwine?"

"Won't tell you 'twell you tell me."

"Well, den, I'll tell you. I'se gwine whichebber way you *ain'* gwine."

"No, you ain'. Cause I'se a follerin' you dar."

"Why ain't you workin' wif you' daddy?"

"I doan' hab teh work no mo'. I'se got a job now. I'se Miss Agostine's arrand boy, I is. Dere's Miss Agostine now. What she done tole me teh git? I clean fergit."

Agostine De Fossat had just come down to the gate to look for her errant errand boy. Her white summer frock made the one spot of light against the dark background of the dull brown house in its shadowy flowerless grounds filled with untended fig-trees and moss-laden live-oaks.

A scrap of a girl was Agostine, very small and dark with a piquant devil's beauty, under masses of lusterless coal black hair. A little over-intense she was in gesture, over-alert in poise, over-beseeching in eye-prayer, over-sensitive of mouth,— a sweet, good, self-conscious, romantic little girl, devoid of humor.

She was plainly startled at the sight of Melindy, and clasped her little brown hands over her heart as the children approached. Edwin she punished with a long, reproachful glance and smiled upon Melindy, who gave her Nathalie's letter with the cordial remark,

"You suttinly is a sight fo' sore eyes, Miss Du Fossat. You ain' been to our house sence longer'n it teks a alligator teh turn somersaults."

"Ah!" said Agostine, with her quaint foreign accent, "'tis from my very own dear Nathalie. Go you into the orchard, Melindy, and eat what you will. Edwin, go at once to your mother, who will scold you well. I will soon write an answer, Melindy."

Melindy hastened into the orchard and up the garden ladder, which luckily stood beneath her favorite tree.

"Got-a be quick," she thought, "fo' well I knows dis Miss Agostine. She's kine an' lib'ral but awful subjec' teh a change ob heart. She'll tell you teh go pick figses an' den ef you doan' keep yo' ears tight shut, fust thing you knows she'll be a callin' teh you teh come look at pictures, befo' you done got yo'self mo'n half full o' figses."

So Melindy climbed the tree like a lizard, while Edwin dragged his reluctant steps to the kitchen.

Agostine ran upstairs, threw herself upon her bed, the note still unopened, clasped to her breast.

"Oh! my darling Nathalie!" she wailed, "my adored Nathalie! What thoughts I have had of you! I dare not show even your good writing my deceitful face. You trust me still — you do not know,— and I — I tried my best to make Gerald forget you. As if any one could forget you for me! And even I dreaded to have you come home,— I, who have always wanted you! — and I invited him and invited him until he became tired of coming. So blind was I! And now, what have you written to me?

Some sweet thing you would not have written if you knew,— it will stab to my heart. But, I must now look."

Melindy would certainly have condemned Agostine's Latin temperament as indeed "subjec' to a change ob heart," if she could have seen the quick transformation from theatrical tragedy to girlish incredulous delight that brought her to sit sharp upright, smiling as she read,—

"*Tina, Tinalina:*

You precious little idiot, when are you coming to see me? I've been looking in every crack and pigeonhole for you, ever since I've been home and I can't find you anywhere. Am I not enough to attract you, alone, or *must I invite Gerald to supper on Sunday?* Or any other person you name if your caprice has found another victim? There — do you get *that,* littlest tragedy queen?

Come along and be simple!

Thine own,

NATHALIE."

Just as Agostine had completed a beatific note accepting Nathalie's invitation and frankly, eagerly choosing Gerald for her vis-a-vis at supper, a wild scream broke upon her happy bewilderment.

She sprang to the window to see Melindy on the ladder, madly pulling herself up into the branches of the tree to escape the huge pitchfork with which

Edward on the ground below essayed to puncture her agile legs.

Once safe she looked down and glared upon him.

"Ef you'll say dat you'll be my gal I'll let you down," said the precocious Boy from Back of Town.

With difficulty refraining from tears of vexation, Melindy saw Agostine hastening to the rescue, and ignored her tantalizer. For, as she foresaw, he was at once ignominiously banished.

"Come you down, Melindy child. Here is your note for Miss Nathalie. Never mind Edwin. He is a wicked tease, but means no harm."

Melindy smiled. "H'm! When hahm's done been done, it's done been done jess es brown's ef somebody meant it. Man ain't no deader ef you shoots him 'cause you hates him den ef you shoots him fo' a joke. But dat-ar boy *do* mean hahm, Missy. An' he's mo' trouble dan lessons in summer."

"But he likes you, Melindy," pursued Agostine. "Did he not say he wanted you for his little sweetheart?"

"Huh! Dat's jess 'cause I ain' got no use fo' him. Ef I went along *lookin'* fo' dat boy he'd go lookin' fo' somebody else. Men's jess dat contrary, Miss Agostine."

The impressionable Agostine started, then she stood a moment in thought.

"Wait a little longer, *cherie*," she said, "I'll change this note, I think."

And accepting the advice, unconsciously given, of

her small guide, philosopher and friend, she re-entered the house, destroyed her letter and wrote to Nathalie that she would sup on Sunday with her and the family alone.

"I'd like Gerald, of course," she added honestly, "but I think it is *his* move now."

"Now, go home quickly, my dear," she said as she gave the revised note to the child. "Edwin shall rest indoors until you have gone. He shall not bother you."

Melindy departed gladly from the scene of her persecutions, for, accustomed to the affectionate protection of all her world, she was keenly sensitive to malice and mischief.

She could not hurry too rapidly, she knew. For her Miss Nathalie had urged, "Do be quick, child."

And Miss Carrie had laughingly added, "Yes, Eros, speed fleetly," for she understood the underlying motive of Nathalie's anxiety.

Though Robert and Nathalie were living through the golden days of that radiant understanding that precedes speech and precludes it, there was still the pang of a painful perplexity in the feeling that, by forces outside themselves, they were withheld from speaking.

The General, for all his grim brusqueness, was a sentimentalist unashamed. He felt that it was Robert's duty not to tell his love until time had healed a little the freshness of Gerald's wound, or

by slow gradations had shown to the less fortunate wooer the true state of Nathalie's predilections.

Freely to Robert and by delicate innuendo to Nathalie, the General had made his opinions known. His wishes were law unto them both.

Robert, himself, though he did not take Gerald's fancy with great seriousness, was loth to wound his brother's vanity and unwillingly willing to wait until the youngster's susceptible soul should be preoccupied by some other charmer.

This position Nathalie understood. Besides, she had seen in Gerald's attitude to Agostine, in his consideration of her caprices, in his admiring, pleased amusement at her vehement little intensities, in the quiet protection of his manner to her, a stability and reality of interest that had been entirely absent from his more spectacular courtship of Nathalie herself.

Knowing that Agostine had made Gerald the hero of her dreams, Nathalie hoped, by judicious juxtaposition, to waken this romance to self-consciousness. Therefore, the note that Melindy carried was freighted with many hopes, and the answer eagerly awaited.

Time passed and the day grew old, but the little messenger did not reappear.

Heavy rain came down, a steady, semi-tropic downpour without enthusiasm or fitfulness, an earnest, business-like drenching rain that fell in undeviating windless sheets and soon flooded the streets from curb to curb.

Miss Carrie and Nathalie were distressed, for the child had gone without an umbrella.

But Suky scoffed at their anxiety.

"Nemmind, honeys," she said, "she's a'right. Dat li'l niggah ain' no salt ner yit sugar. She won't melt. She's standin' under some shed or on somebody's gallery mos' likely,— a-waiting fo' de rain to pass an' tellin' all she knows an' a whole lot mo'."

But, no; Melindy was in flight, pursued by her ancient enemy, the Boy from Back o' Town.

He had escaped his guards and stalked forth with a "cap-pistol" a small, noisy toy weapon that was all bark and no bite but very formidable to see and hear.

"Hello! Am dis you?" he asked triumphantly appearing in her path.

"Dis am de essence ob me," replied Melindy with great dignity.

"I got somefin fo' you."

"I doan' want it, thank you."

"Doan' you want I should tell you whar 'tis?"

Melindy made no reply.

"Look hyah! I went fishin' in de bayou dis mohnin'. Hyah's a li'l fish I cotched fo' you. I didn' dare tote it out befo' Miss Agostine an' ma mammy. But looky hyah"— and Edwin unbuttoned his blouse and revealed a small fish, long dead but still clinging with great constancy to the not too clean fabric of his undershirt.

Melindy, the exquisite, shuddered and hastened forward.

But Edwin was patient.

"You ain' got no call teh be so stuck-up, M'lindy, if you does go to school every day. I goes teh school, too,— some days. I done been teh kindergarten too. Is you ebber been teh kindergarten, M'lindy?"

"No," scornfully, "I ain' nebber been li'l enough."

"M'lindy, I want you fo' ma li'l sweetheart, I does."

"Say, hyah, boy! Mebbe you cayn't always git what you wants, but you kin always want whar you kin git,— ef das any comfort." Melindy enjoyed her own wit and would have become better-humored at once if Edwin, at this juncture, had not whipped out his pistol and begun to fire.

Melindy had a dire fear of firearms and did not appreciate the inoffensive nature of this one. She screamed and ran. At first in a leisurely nonchalance, later quickening his pace, Edwin ran around the block and met her as she turned the corner.

The passersby — and they were few — saw only a pair of pickaninnies at a game. But Melindy was in true terror and ran from street to street until she had lost Edwin, indeed,— but her way as well.

And, then, the rain fell heavily.

Melindy stood under a fruit dealer's shed, very near to tears, waiting for the rain to cease that she might inquire the way to the car that would take her home.

Poor little one! Her heart was deeply torn, for, in the flurry and distress of the chase, she had lost Miss Agostine's letter. And in her responsibility to an errand she was conscience itself.

In the meantime her mistress and Miss Nathalie, hourly growing more alarmed, had, in watching through the window, seen Gerald, with his trousers rolled up, picking his way along the car-tracks, through the flood.

He hailed them gayly and they called eagerly in chorus, "Going down town, Gerry? Oh! *Can* you come here first?"

He turned his trousers still higher and nobly waded through the waters and came to the door for instructions.

"Thy slave!" he said to Nathalie. "Talk about your Hellesponts!"

"Indeed the gods have sent you," she laughed, then mysteriously, "who knows? Perhaps a god from the machine! Will you go," she continued seriously, "to Du Fossats' to hunt Melindy? She's been gone perfect ages and it's raining so. I sent her with a note to Agostine asking her to come here for supper Sunday night and whether I might invite you too,"— for Nathalie, reckoning without Melindy, never dreamed that Agostine would decide against Gerald's presence,—"so, you see, it's to your interest too."

He went, of course, and, before he reached the Maison Du Fossat, encountered the drenched, dis-

tressed and desolate Melindy recounting to the sympathetic fruiterer the wickedness of the Boy from Back o' Town.

She wept for joy at the sight of Gerald.

"Mas'r Gerry! Mas'r Gerry!" she cried, "you'se a pink angel wif gol' wingses, you sho' is! I'se losted, Mas'r Gerry. Please teh find me, sah. An'," here the tears rivaled the rain, "I'se done losted Miss 'Gostine's writin'. White folks suttinly do love to write, Mas'r Gerry. Ef she'd done *tole* me de answer 'twouldn't nebber happened. An' moufs was made before writin' paper, sah, an' you cayn't lose dem. Wush dat-ar Edwin La Rouche niggah could lose his'n. Nobody'd begrudge him de loss." And she related her wrongs.

Gerald laughed and comforted her. "Never mind, Melindy. You come along with me, and jump on the next car and go home to get some dry clothes. And I'll go to Miss Agostine's and find out her answer for Miss Nathalie. And I'll fix that bad boy too!"

"Huh! Nothin' cayn't fix dat boy. He was made wrong from de start. Cayn't fix dar-ar Edwin, any more'n you kin fix a bad aig, Mas'r Gerry. Loss of folks is some bad an' some folks is lots bad,—but dat boy's a out-an-outer!"

Partially placated, rather enjoying the consciousness of a new adventure, Melindy rode homeward.

Gerald approached the home of the Du Fossats.

He was not sure whether he drew nearer to Agos-

tine with pain or pleasure. But he was conscious of a peculiar hesitancy, a half-unwilling expectancy in his mood.

More than once during his long pursuit of Nathalie, the thought of Agostine had brought a vague, distant promise and pleasure, like the far-off sound of running water, and for some months he had all but abandoned the bright quest to rest in this gentle ravine.

But in a little while, he had blamed himself for inconstancy,— not recognizing the fuller call,— and followed the old flame with greater ardor. Still, there always was to him in Agostine's presence a restful peace that made his subsequent restlessness the greater.

Agostine was singing. A man was singing with her. The lamp in the drawing-room was lighted; and, Gerald saw, bending over the pianoforte, Agostine's second cousin, Lieutenant Ramon de Bonneville. They were singing that delightsome Elizabethan song,

N'oserez-vous, mon bel ami?

singing charmingly, with voices harmoniously blended. But Gerald found no pleasure in the song.

Indeed, it so piqued him that he sounded the bell quickly to put an end to it, saying to himself with some rancour, "The *Montana* must be in port again. Hasn't that ship anything to do but hang around New Orleans?"

The room looked inviting after the rain. There were fresh roses newly set in a vase,— a spray of leaves had fallen to the well-worn carpet.

Agostine was flushed, with the song, perhaps,— perhaps, Gerald thought, not only the song.

He felt injured, though without cause, he ruefully realized.

No, he would not come in further than the hallway. He had come to bring a message.

Briefly, a little stiffly, he told of Edwin's misdoings and Melindy's disaster, extracted a promise of punishment for the sinful back-o-towner and then,

"If you will write another note to take the place of the lost one," he said, "or give me a verbal message, if you like, I shall be glad to be your courier."

"Thank you," said Agostine, "I am sorry you have so much trouble. Please, then, tell Nathalie that I will so gladly come to her Sunday evening, and that, if she please,"— here Agostine flushed more ruddily —"I should prefer no other guest to be with us."

Gerald started with a stab of pain. Of course she did not know that he was aware that his own presence had been suggested by Nathalie. But why had Agostine not desired it?

"Good night," said Gerald, and departed.

"By Jove!" he added to himself, "who ever would have thought that Agostine Du Fossat was a flirt!"

Then the fundamental honesty that underlay his

boyish exuberancies and vagaries asserted itself. Gerald stood still in the rain and frankly faced his own consciousness.

He laughed.

"And I never knew it!" he exclaimed, "all the time!

"I wonder if Nathalie thought,— if that's why she wrote, why she said that crypticism about the god from the machine! By Jove! Maybe I've been discovering more than a lost little pickaninny."

He hastened back to the white house to be sure of that small person's safe arrival.

Melindy, clad in dry raiment was eating her supper, surrounded by her admiring court of children. The elders, with Gerald, went into the servants' dining-room to see her.

"Well, Melindy," Gerald assured her, "Miss Agostine says she will punish Edwin well."

Melindy looked up dubiously.

"Mebbe so," she said, "but mos' likely she'll jess look sorrowful till Edwin tells her some grea' big fib. You see, Miss Nathalie, dis-ar Miss 'Gostine, she ain' sech a strong strength to nobody's quarrel, 'cause she's in favor of everybody."

"Oh! Melindy! She isn't," cried Gerald. To himself he wondered, "Is she?" and aloud he said, "Well, anyway, that boy will no longer trouble you. For I'll ask Uncle Jasper Robinson to give strict orders that Edwin shall never speak to you at all."

Melindy jumped down from her chair in dismay.

"Please, sah, doan' do dat!" she urged, "please, sah, doan! I doesn' mind Edwin so much, at all, no mo'. You see, eberybody has teh hab a enemy. An' dis-ar Edwin Halley Osbo'ne La Rouche, he's sech a good, sharp enemy,— lak a dash ob seasonin' in de gravy."

CHAPTER VIII

FOOLS' GOLD

THE day that everybody got lost became historic in the annals of the family. It was a day of bewilderments and searchings.

Baby began the excitement. Baby had recently discovered the real use of his feet. He had long outgrown the notion that they were primarily to chew upon and, with occasional backslidings, had even abandoned the later usage of rapturous wigglings and fumblings with the lovely, round, pink toes that decorated them. This was largely — it must be admitted — because they were encased in hard shiny shoes that did not come off as readily as had the soft woolen bootees of an earlier stage. Nowadays, he saw their natural charms at sleepy times only, or on the way to the more interesting bath.

But one day he had found by chance that — carefully and with misgivings, it is true — one could raise oneself up and rest upon them, upright, emancipated for one ecstatic, wobbly, fearsome moment before they gave 'way all too suddenly for comfort.

Baby was a true sportsman. He essayed this position again and again and was not dismayed by unpremeditated and numerous sitting-downs on hard

floors or nursery rugs. After many trials he could circle a chair or follow the wall for a few uncertain minutes with comparative safety and success.

At this point, Mother and Mammy undertook to spur ambition forward, one holding him upright, the other kneeling on the far end of the rug,— many leagues away, it seemed to Baby,— and urging him to cross alone the endless distance between them.

For a long time, on these occasions, Baby looked at the intervening space with a dubious smile, then put his finger in his mouth, shook his head, turned his back upon the enterprise and buried a tearful and humiliated face on a protecting bosom.

But at last, one happy day, he felt that he could do it. His heart beat high, he was filled with devil-may-care recklessness, a fever of great emprise. He started. The die was cast. He hurled himself forward. Mother caught him. Somehow the distance was passed. It was done!

Oh! The joyous chortles then, the cries of delight that brought an admiring family up into the nursery, the kissings and congratulations, the festival dance of adoring sister and brothers. Baby had walked.

Since then he had learned by experience the secret of automatic transportation. One had only to lift a foot as high as was compatible with a vertical position, put it down as far forward as the consequent angle would permit, draw oneself up to it and

repeat with the other foot. This was quite delightful and made sad and lonely vigils unnecessary and *passées.*

To the enslaved family, however, Baby's progress had one serious defect. He had an adventuresome spirit and, as he gained in accuracy, speed and self-reliance, developed a habit of sly and mysterious disappearances, that drove his good old black Mammy "pretty nigh frantic."

On the morning of this eventful day, her Baby had lost himself twice in the big garden. "Fo' de land's sake!" she panted, settling her bright bandanna headdress and rearranging the neat white fichu on her ample bosom, as she appeared driving her high-stepping and unrepentant charge before her, "I'se done nussed you an' yo' Ma an' yo' aunts and uncles an' all de chilluns in dis-yer fambly; an' I ain't nebber seen sich a gad-about es you is, in all ma born days. Yo' ole Mammy's too ole fo' all dis huntin' an' chasin'. You needs a good lickin', you does, honey. Come hyah an' kiss yo' Mammy. Did yeh ever see anythin' lak dat boy?" she asked proudly.

"I know jess how you feel, Mammy dear," Eulalia sighed as she ran to bring Mammy a big palm-leaf fan, "I have just the same troubles with Cheeweety. I've begged that chicken, and begged and begged and *begged* her not to run away. But she will do it, Mammy,— just like Baby will. Only you can keep Baby 'mused *some* of the time. But that

chicken, just as soon as I'm having fun anywhere she starts to run away and I have to get up and spoil my comfy."

Cheeweety was a tall, awkward, moulting, homely, nondescript, thin, gray pullet that had been given to Eulalia in its deceptive younger days of fluffy, yellow prettiness.

Cheeweety had a long neck, a large head and an absurd amazed expression. To that exasperating, projectile-like neck-motion, common to all hens, Cheeweety added a strange sea-going swaying of the body. And, except for her impish skill in eluding pursuers, Cheeweety had no sense at all.

Melindy always looked upon her with disdain.

"Huh!" she often said, "dat ole big-haided chickum sho' is stupid, I *tell* you. Dey's lots ob room in her haid fo' good-sized brains dat ain't dar."

"'Tain't dess 'cause she's a chicken dat she's so plum' stupid," Melindy explained. "Some birds is smarter den folks. I doesn' mean Polly. We all knows what dat ole witchy Pol-parrot is;"— Melindy lowered her voice in awe,— but look at de crows! A farmer had a crow could go anywheres wif a letter. You tell him de number an' he could go anywheres you tell him. An' Remus an' Ramus use-teh had a buzzard could surprise you any time. Dat buzzard could go fro' motions lots quicker'n Remus an' Ramus could. When dat-ar bird stood up in a row 'tween ma dear Remus an' Ramus, de whole three ob

dem twistin' dey haids on deir long necks, dis-er way an' dat-er way, de way dey does, 'mos' any school-teacher would of choosed de buzzard.

"An' s'pose he did bit me! I doan' hole him no hate fo' dat. What claim is I got teh go pokin' out ma hand teh shake hands wif dat buzzard, an' me a stranger to him?

"But dat Cheeweety! Lands deliver us f'um dat chickum!"

But Eulalia was loyal to her unresponsive pet and grieved sorely when she could not find her.

"Law, chile! Is dat-ar bird gone got losted agin?" asked sympathetic Mammy.

"Oh, Mammy dear, I'm afraid so. We finded her twice this morning; once in the pansy-bed,— and Jacques was *very* cross,— and once in the kitchen in the pudding bowl,— and Suky nearly made me cry about it, Mammy. Oh-h! Here's my Cheeweety now!"

A great squawking was heard amid wild shouts of derision, as a very forlorn and draggled Cheeweety appeared, dripping and sticky, followed by Eustace, Peter and Melindy, doubled up and screaming with mirth.

The boys were speechless for laughter, and by necessity content to point at the poor pullet and clap their thighs joyfully.

But Melindy, seeing Eulalia's distressful expression, managed to gasp, "She's — all — right — Missy Euly. She's — on'y — done fell — in — de

— molasses barrel. Whoop!" added Melindy, unable to control her enjoyment.

The angry bird found refuge in the lap of the Baby, who yelled for a second, but immediately solaced himself with the sweet syrup that covered his face and frock.

"Go' 'way!" cried Mammy, in a rage. "Git off'n ma Baby, chickum! Come 'long, 'Lalia. Fotch her in de back yard. We'll wash her off, underneaf de water-faucet. An' den I'll hab teh tek dis chile upstairs an' bathe him."

"Funny how Cheeweety loves the baby," sighed Eulalia. "She never comes to *me*, unless I drag her."

"Is you jealous ob de Baby or on'y pitying him?" asked Melindy. "Dat-ar pullet could hate me lak fire hates water an' dere wouldn't be a crumb ob loving gone teh waste between us.

"But she sho' is onfortunate. Ef de best chickum-food fell down from de sky, dat bird'd hab a sore throat an' couldn't swaller."

As the sticky chicken, the sticky baby and their respective guardians disappeared behind the house, Melindy and the boys, still laughing at intervals, sat down on the grass beneath the pomegranate tree.

"Go on, Melindy," said Eustace; "tell us more about finding buried treasure."

"Well, li'l Marse Eustace, I ain' nebber *found* no buried treasure myse'f. I was born teh be rich, but somehow it done slipped back on me. But I know how it *kin* be found ef dey is any. You 'member dat,

white man dat done come 'round teh C'lina Dinah an' say he was a census taker?"

"Yes, Melindy. And Dinah said to go away because she needed all her senses to do her work with?" laughed Peter.

"Yassir, li'l Marse Peter, dat's de very man. Well, he found a pot ob gold by conjurin', dey tell me, an' done had it all put inteh his teeth. Ain' you noticed what a lot ob gold he's got in his teeth?"

"Oh! Melindy!" expostulated Eustace, "the *dentists* have *that* gold."

"Sho'ly dey does. Sho'ly dey has it. But whar dey done *got it?* Tell me dat now, li'l Marse Eustace!"

Eustace did not know and was too eager for the story to waste time in debate. He drew up his knees and clasped his hands about them. Peter lay on the grass and dug his elbows in the springing turf to make a little hand-shelf for his chin. Melindy beamed upon these attentive listeners.

"Well," said she, "de wise ole people, dey believes in *diggin'* fo' money."

"Pirates' money?" asked Peter, "Lafitte's money, down on Barataria Bay? I know a boy who digs there every summer when he goes to the bay with his folks."

"Never finds anything, though," added Eustace.

"Da's 'cause he doan' know *how* teh go 'bout it."

"How, then?"

"Wait, wait, boy. You'se in 'most es big a hurry

es de grocer's boy 'round Christmas time. I'se comin' teh dat part.

"Dey's heaps mo' money buried around in de groun' dan anybody knows. In de ole days, dey didn' hab no banks, Sis Suky says,— in de times 'way back before de war. People all had deir money in big iron pots an' buried 'em in de groun'.

"So, ob co'se, dey's lots of it dar now, whar folkses done died an' ain' told nobody whar dey put it."

"Well, how do you find it? Just dig?"

"Co'se not. You couldn't go 'round diggin' up de whole worl' lak dat, could yeh? You jess goes along till you finds a empty place whar looks lak rich folks might ob lived dar. Den you buys a conjurin' rod — dat's a li'l iron rod dat witch-curers and hoo-doo-doctors sells — or you finds a conjurin' reed in de swamps. Dat's a long, pointed reed wif a hole in it.

"Den you walks around an' holds out yo' rod or yo' reed an' puts it down on de grass hyah an' dar.

"An' bimeby you'll see de grass an' de bushes tremble. An' wherever dey trembles, *right dar* is de money! Jess dig lak mad.

"On'y — de whole time while you's a-diggin', or any time atter de groun' done trembled, doan' you talk one word. 'Cause, ef you does, de money'll jess slide away an' glide away under de groun' an' go teh some yuther place; an' you cayn't nebber find it no mo'.

"'Tain't no good, yo' diggin' atter you done spoke. Once, up on a plantation, Sis Suky woke up an' some folks had dug up a well outside her window, in de night. But dey nebber got a penny, 'cause a muskeeter come an' bit 'em an' dey said 'Shoo!'"

"And if you find the money, is it yours? I mean, — ought it to be?" asked conscientious Peter.

"Ob co'se! Ain't you *found* it? What good it gwine do anybody, layin' in de groun'? On'y you got teh wash it in vinegar teh clean it, befo' you try teh spend any ob it. Ef you doan', it'll fly away fro' de air right smaht."

"I'd like to see that," said Eustace, smiling quizzically. "I've often heard grown-ups say 'Money flies!',— but I thought that they meant something different."

"Melindy," pursued Eustace, "did you ever know any one — truly to know, your very own self — that looked for treasure with rods or reeds?"

"Yassir. An' *you* did too. Jacques, our own gardener, is got a reed. I done saw lots ob folks hunt wif 'em. So!"

"But, Melindy,"— Eustace's mind was judicial,— "did you ever know — to really know, you know — anybody to *find* any treasure?"

"Marse Eustace, you sho' is pertickler. Ain't you got no confidence in *nothin'?* You'se one ob dese hyeah chilluns dat ef you slips a candy in deir moufs, dey takes it right out an' looks at it teh be shore dat dey's really got it."

"But *did* they ever find any treasure,— anybody you know, I mean?"

"No, sah,—'cause some fool nigger alluz done forgot an' talked an' de money alluz runned away. But Jacques is done been near enough to it teh hyear it rattle!"

"How could it move, do you suppose?"

"Dunno! Jacques knew a woman come to a plantation teh help pick cotton. An' she planted some ob her *own* money under a tree. An' when she come teh git it, it'd done moved."

"Do you think, Melindy," Eustace asked, "that Jacques would let us see his conjuring reed?"

Melindy leaned forward, her eyes glowing and her lips parted with excitement. This was the dramatic moment for which she had been planning.

"Marse Peter an' Marse Eustace," she said in a vibrant whisper, "Jacques done said we-uns could borrer his conjurin' reed and go hunt fo' treasure any time we ask 'im fo' it!"

The boys were at once as excited as she. Peter had his doubts as to the efficacy of magic wands, and Eustace had no doubts as to their inefficacy,— both having frequently been warned against the negro superstitions. But, for the purpose of the game, they were willing,— with childhood's total surrender to the imagination — to believe in the formula absolutely.

"Let's go *now!*" they cried.

"You run ask Jacques for the reed and Eustace

can find Eulalia and I'll ask Mammy if we may go; — Mother and Cousin Nathalie are out this morning," proposed Peter.

"Where could we hunt?" asked Eustace.

"How 'bout ole Marse Mandeville's big back lot?"

Trust Melindy for finding the proper stage setting! That was the right place, exactly right,— but dared they? Where in the prosperous, beautiful neighborhood of broad, cordial homes and cultivated flowering gardens could buried treasure be but there, at queer old Mr. Mandeville's? If they but dared!

Around a corner and two blocks away, rose his dull ochre house, its shabby porches seemingly held together by the wild tangle of uncared-for rose and honeysuckle vines.

The scanty grass between the house and the street was darkened by the shadows of two great, handsome, moss-covered live-oaks. Trailing moss, so graceful, light and lovely in the children's own bright garden, seemed to swing here wraithlike and forlorn.

Back of the house stood a vast abandoned garden, grown high with grass and weeds, and known to the neighborhood as old Mr. Mandeville's big back lot.

Queer old Mr. Mandeville lived here with his antique English butler, as silent as himself. A wealthy man, son of an old historic family, his seclusion was optional and had been taken amiss by the neighbors whose calls he had brusquely ignored.

Mr. Mandeville was a student and lived in his library. The only recent communication between the

dull yellow house and the big white one was a stiff little note threatening Cheeweety's life if she ever made her way again into those distant and silent precincts.

Knowing her varied propensities, nobody had dared inquire just what form of mischief her presence at Mr. Mandeville's had taken.

If Peter, in asking Mammy's consent, had said, "May we go to old Mr. Mandeville's to look for treasure?" her answer would have been a mighty negative.

But Peter in his excitement had called out, "Oh! Mammy! Mammy! If Jacques lends Melindy his conjuring reed, may we hunt for buried treasure?"

And Mammy, never dreaming that their plan included any garden but their own, and not inquiring further,— for she was excited too,— replied, "Yas, chile; yas, chile. *Has* you seen dat baby? He's done run away agin. I jess got fro' washin' him and changin' his dress and lef' him hyah on a rug on de grass, jess as peaceful an' quiet, playin' wif he rubber dolly. Oh! Massy me! Baby — you, Baby! Come teh Mammy!"

"Do you want me to look for him, Mammy?"

"No, no. Run along. I'll find him. I got teh ax Marse George teh put a chain on dat baby."

Melindy came singing down the walk, waving the precious reed,— a long, dried rush, slashed in the center and marked with pencil.

Eustace followed calling, "'Lalia doesn't want to

come. Cheeweety's lost again and she's gone down to the stable to look for her. Would the conjuring reed help find Cheeweety, do you think, Melindy?"

"See hyah, honey. Doan' temp' me teh destroy dis-ar reed ob Jacques'! No; *'cose* dis-yer magic ain't a-gwine teh condescend teh hunt up no triflin' chickum. Come 'long!"

Mammy did not notice their absence for a long time, being distracted by a deeper woe. Baby could not be found!

Every nook and corner of the garden was examined. The frightened servants were dispatched throughout the immediate neighborhood. Poor Mammy bravely dared to search even the lily pond.

The pretty "feathery" head and the high-stepping boots were nowhere to be seen.

"I'se been mammying fo' mos' fifty years," sobbed the good old nurse, "an' I ain' nebber los' a baby untwell now. We-all got teh find dat chile!"

"Shh! Shh!" soothed Suky. "He's right high, somewha's. Us will find him, Mammy. Maybe he's wif Missy Euly. Whar *is* Missy Euly? You didn' leave her all alone in de stables, Lewis, did yeh?"

"No 'ndeedy! She lef' de stables long ago. Done gone 'round de neighborhood cryin' an' huntin' up dat no-'count bird she's so sot on."

"Now, lissen at dat, Mammy, honey. You hyeah dat? I reckon Euly done took Baby wif her teh hunt up Cheeweety. Dey'll come back in a minute."

Mammy tried hard to believe it, but still anxiously

kept up the search. Of a sudden, she stopped short in terror and rubbed her eyes like one in a horrid dream.

"Whar's *all* dem chillun?" she called out. "Whar's Eustace an' Peter and Melindy an' *all*? Hab somebody done hoodooed all dem lambs away?"

"Ef somebody done bewitched 'em, it's Melindy dat's done it," said Suky. "Dey's all right, Mammy, ef dey's wif Melindy. She woan' let no hahm come to 'em. But hahm's a-gwine-a come teh her when I gits her home agin."

No divination warned her of this fate, as, hidden by the tall weeds, Melindy and the boys slipped through a slatless aperture in the fence and silently tracked their secret path through Mr. Mandeville's back lot,— the little leader waving the conjuring reed before her.

Occasionally they paused for a breathless survey of the rear windows of the house; for terror of Mr. Mandeville lent a delicious tang to the adventure.

"He'll be glad when he finds de money, and us kin gib him some ob it," Melindy had said, "but it's gen'ally more easier teh get folks teh be pleased teh let you do things when you's done succeeded at dem, dan it is before you commence teh try."

Again and again, breathing hard in suspense, Melindy laid the reed lightly across some clump of bushes. Then the boys crowded close about her, watching the bush to see if it trembled, afraid to speak for fear that it had. For Melindy's perfect

faith in the conjuring reed had communicated itself to her followers.

She pointed to a hopeful-looking little hollow, behind a line of willows and descended toward it, her long reed pointing the way,— pointing straight into the astonished countenance of Mr. Mandeville himself!

"What on earth —!" he exclaimed. He had been sitting in the long grass, reading.

Peter and Eustace, in unison, said timidly, "Beg pardon, sir!" and dared no more.

"Dat reed sho' trembled den," related Melindy afterwards, "'cause ma hand jess couldn' hold it straight. Didn' need no conjurer teh tell dat I was scared teh death."

But she found her tongue, as always.

"Please, sah, 'scuse us, Marse Mandeville," she said with her most winsome smile. "Us chilluns didn' know you wuz readin' in de gyarden. We-uns thought dis-ar was a let-alone gyarden. We come hyeah teh find some buried treasure."

"So there *are* children left in the world nowadays!" muttered Mr. Mandeville to himself.

He did not look very dreadful; only a little shy and perplexed.

He had been reading *Mungo Park*, when they disturbed him, and did not disdain adventure.

"What are your names?" he asked, as "grown people" always do to children, when at a conversational disadvantage with them. And when he had

heard, "H'm! Melinda! Quite romantic,— suitable to the occasion. And you, Peter,— is that chicken yours?"

No need to ask, "What chicken?" "That chicken," expressed in that tone of scorn, could indicate only Cheeweety. Their hearts sank heavily.

"My sister's, sir. We were sorry Cheeweety annoyed you."

"What did she do, sir?" asked Eustace.

"Only made muddy tracks over a mediæval manuscript,— but you wouldn't know the harm in that, of course."

"Ain' dat Cheeweety all over?" exclaimed Melindy. "We-uns won't ax you teh excuse Cheeweety, Marse Mandeville, 'cause dat Cheeweety don't cyare a whole lot whedder folks is pleased wif her or not. She's sort o' lak de measles,— ain' nebber quit comin' jess because she ain' wanted.

"But please excuse *us*, sah. We ain' doin' no hurt teh nothin'. On'y huntin' fo' buried treasure. Is you ever heard tell of any gold been hid in dis-ar gyarden, Marse Mandeville?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Mandeville.

"Oh!"— the children jumped with surprise and fascinated expectation,—"really?"

"Fools' gold!" said Mr. Mandeville, in a dull, melancholy tone, looking at his book with a frown.

"Hab anybody ebber looked fo' it, sah?" asked Melindy in awe.

"Yes, child. Yes — often!"

"An' cayn't dey find it?"

"I'm afraid not. I fear not, more and more."

"Kin *we* look, sah. An' ef we finds any we'll gib you half ob it."

Mr. Mandeville looked at her and smiled as if seeing the children for the first time.

"Surely look. Good luck to you!" And he sat on the ground again and opened his "Mungo Park."

"We'll wave our hats ef de bush trembles," Melindy promised. "You keep a-lookin' out. 'Cause we mustn't speak a word or de gold will glide away under de ground. You jess keep an eye on us, please, sah, an' come when we waves our hats."

Mungo Park's adventures had never so far failed to hold Mr. Mandeville's attention. Willy nilly, he kept an eye on the youngsters. Strangely, their imaginary hazards seemed real to him, and the thrilling real experiences of the writer, pale and unconvincing.

With brightening eyes he watched their hats moving stealthily just above the weeds and grasses, and felt a gentle quickening of the pulse in sympathy with their excitement, at the occasional halts when the reed was placed so carefully upon the foliage.

Patiently the children kept up the search. Bush after bush was tried, clump of grass after clump. But, always, the reed lay still in the hot and breathless sunlight of the glowing New Orleans noon.

Mr. Mandeville, recluse and voluntary exile from

society, found something unexpectedly pleasant in the children's proximity, in the magical treasure-hunt going on in his own garden, and hoped that their patience would last long.

He had neither hope nor expectation of what really happened, however.

Melindy waved her hat.

Up went Peter's, then Eustace's.

The three stood on tiptoe, their wondering eyes and excited faces barely showing above the grasses.

Mr. Mandeville rose to his feet, feeling queerly excited himself. "Mungo Park" lay open on the ground, forgotten. He hurried toward the children.

Why! It could not be a fact,— and yet the facts seemed to forbid their denial; the bush on which the reed lay was trembling. It was a stiff and bushy old spirea and did not sway easily. Yet all about it was quiet and the old spirea trembled of itself!

The children, half-frightened, half-exultant, pressed eager fingers on their parted lips, enjoining silence. He nodded reassuringly.

And then — alas, for the charm that depended upon perfect speechlessness, alas, for the hope of treasure trove! — two words were clearly spoken.

One was bright and cheery; one was injured and belligerent.

"'Lindy!" was the first.

"Cluck!" was the second.

The sounds rose from the ground, the mystic ground beneath the spirea bush, in the shade of which

sat Baby and Cheeweety, peaceably digging in delighted companionship!

In spite of their disappointment, the children's laughter burst forth.

Mr. Mandeville laughed too,— a performance so unusual that his butler ran to the kitchen door in fright to see what ailed him.

"Ah! Which will you give me?" Mr. Mandeville asked. "You said that I should have half of the treasure. Which half shall it be,— the boy or the chicken?"

Peter looked frightened. Eustace bent puzzled brows,— here was some joke, but not a clear one. But Melindy answered, dimpling:

"Oh! ho! Marse Mandeville, dat chickum ain't no treasure. Us'll let you hab half ob our baby."

Mr. Mandeville had laughed that day, for the first time in long ages, it seemed to him. Now he did a still stranger thing; he felt his eyes fill with tears.

For Melindy, dramatically suiting the action to the word, had picked the baby up, and held him towards the old gentleman. And Baby had liked him at first sight, had extended chubby, welcoming arms and gurgled, "Up! Up! Up!"

Mr. Mandeville took him to his heart.

The door-bell rang. He gave a guilty start, as one about to run to cover, but thought better of it and remained.

"He jess lubs you," said Melindy. "He jess looks at you lak he used teh do at his bottle."

"Do you think he really does?" asked Mr. Mandeville diffidently.

Just then the silent butler appeared, showing no trace of his outraged emotions as he announced, "Another, sir!"

And Eulalia, made brave by affection, crying pitifully, came straight up to him.

"Somebody saw her come in!" she sobbed. "I didn't meant to let her. Oh, *did* you make Cheeweety dead?"

"No, no, honey! No, Miss 'Lalia," Melindy hastened to reassure her. "She's right hyah yet. Whar is dat cayn't-stay-still chickum?"

She was pecking at the leaves of *Mungo Park!*

But the extraordinary old gentleman only smiled.

"Come into the house and let us have some lemonade and cake," he invited.

Forgetting their own luncheon-hour, the children obeyed, Eulalia with her recovered darling in her arms and queer old Mr. Mandeville carrying the baby.

They enjoyed their goodies in the dim library — the children had never dreamed there were so many books in the world.

Peter examined their titles without delay and found one shelf all of the same story, so he thought. Big books, little books, fat books, lean books, all bearing the one label: *Homer.*

"I wish I knew about this," he said.

"Do you?" Their host's eyes beamed. "Well, sit right still and I will tell you."

Is it any wonder that the obligations of luncheon at home and waiting, anxious Mammy were forgotten, while the children, well-fed upon cake, sat in a charmed circle, riding with the "wily Ulysses" on the "loudly-surging sea"?

When they thanked him at parting, Melindy added prettily, "Dem lovely stories wuz real true gold teh us."

"Fools' gold!" said Mr. Mandeville, and asked them to come again.

On the way homeward, panic and remorse overtook them. The luncheon-hour had long passed. Mammy did not know where they were. She would be so uneasy! They would be punished!

Melindy tried to cheer her fellow-sinners.

"Come 'long, chillun," said she. "Doan' cry before you's hurted or you won't hab nothin' proper lef' teh do afterwards. Come 'long, now. Dis-yer ole Ulysses, he warn't afeared ob *nothin'*."

But the sight of Suky waiting at the gate was not soothing to guilty consciences, nor was her threat to "fix" Melindy "fo' leadin' dem chilluns inteh mischief."

Poor Mammy, more forgiving, forgot her spent anxiety in the joy of seeing them all safe and at home again.

Her mistress had returned and the row of little

culprits soon stood before her. They were almost as eager to share with her the story of their wonderful experience, as they were reluctant to be blamed or punished for their sins.

Miss Carrie heard them sympathetically, with her usual true intuition into the thoughts and motives of childhood.

Her inclination to treat their truancy leniently changed to the conviction that it was best to do so when, at the end of the interesting confession, Lewis appeared bearing this note in Mr. Mandeville's clear, small, scholarly handwriting:

> The joys of life I called "Fools' Gold"
> Because they vanished from my hand,
> Oh! did I fail to understand —
> The hand, perhaps, too weak to hold?
>
> In scorn I left the joys of life
> To live with heroes' golden dreams,
> Philosophers' and poets' gleams,
> In golden leisure, far from strife.
>
> That glitter fading I behold,
> It palls and wearies more and more,
> My lonely learning I deplore
> And call the joys of thought, "Fools' Gold!"
>
> Real riches from your wondrous store
> Crossed my impoverished path to-day.
> Be generous, Lady; bid them stay
> To teach true worth of life and lore!

Miss Carrie's tender eyes grew moist as she gave the note to Nathalie, saying, "Who would have

expected this? My dear, I fear we have been most uncharitable to Mr. Mandeville."

But even her sympathy could not foresee the changes opening to Mr. Mandeville that day, nor know how bitterly they were needed.

Nathalie read the verses and "Oh, Caroline!" she cried, "Poor, lonely old gentleman! We must let them go often. And the children enjoyed him, too, — even Cheeweety and the Baby. Didn't you, Peter? *Peter!* What are you thinking so hard?"

For Peter, unheeding her question, was gazing off pensively out of the window.

"'*Polu-kluptos*,'" he quoted. "It *does* sound just like the surf!"

"We-chilluns didn' find gold wif our conjurin' reed, but we sho' did find gold in dem stories," said Melindy.

"Fools' gold!" sighed Nathalie tenderly, "fools' gold — revealed to none but those who believe in magic!"

"'Twas me done led dem to it," said Melindy.

"And are led thereto by love!" added Nathalie.

CHAPTER IX

STRICTLY COMMERCIAL

"Now, Melindy," said little Eulalia, bustling out of the kitchen door, with her apron full of bright-colored bits of cloth, "Mother says we may play sand-store, if we can keep friendly with the Flemmingses children and not have so many discusses about everything. Do you think we can do it without making discusses, Melindy?"

Melindy looked up from her little wheelbarrow laden with white beach sand.

"H'm, Missy," she replied, "we-uns kin promise not teh *make* no fusses, 'cause you an' me, we's not fussers, Missy 'Lalia. But we jess cayn't promise dat dem air Flemmingses won't kick up ructions. 'Cause dey suttinly is mighty fond ob rarin' an' tearin', dem Flemmingses is. I done passed by deir house, a week ago, come Wednesday, an' I smole a real pleasant smile at dat-ar littlest Flemming, dat Missy Rosy. But 'tain't done a mite of good. Her feelin's war still hurted. Some folkses gits a heap ob enjoyment out of havin' deir feelin's hurted."

"Well, I didn't *mean* to hurt Rosy's feelings. Only it *was* a bent pin, Melindy, and the sand *was* made dark with common black ink."

Playing sand-store is an important element of child-life in New Orleans. The little merchants buy white sand, or entice willing parents to order it for them. Then follows the dear joy of transforming its whiteness into the crude tones loveliest to childhood the world over.

The methods of dyeing are primitive. Bags made of gaudy fabrics are filled with sand and boiled until the bright dyes penetrate the contents. Bluing from the laundry is poured over saucerfuls of sand. Beet juice makes delightful pinks and crimsons. The purple of grape skins, the corals of waxberries, the yellows that hide in tomato parings, the delicate green water in which spinach has been cooked, the surpassing scarlet from a few drops of red ink — ah! but New Orleans children know what beauty comes to simple sand through these!

No subsequent possessions cause more envy of the fortunate than is directed toward that child who owns a discarded box of water-color paints.

Ambition does not halt at mere solid tones but blends white sand and the tinted product into the most wonderful "pepper and salt" or variegated combinations.

Melindy and Eulalia set out their wares at the garden gate, on a small table and overturned boxes covered with threadbare napkins and tissue paper. Cardboard boxes full of the precious, gorgeous sands, brown paper cornucopias for wrapping customers'

purchases, little tin scoops and measures were spread grandly upon them.

In the distance under the mulberry tree sat the willing helpers, Remus and Ramus, turning out the colored sand from the little tin pots in which it had been made, into the little tin dishes in which it was to be offered for sale.

The Twins had splattered their faces and splashed their hands with color until they looked like Indians on the warpath. But fear of careful, C'lina Dinah, their mother, had caused them to protect their immaculate, starchy garments. Each wore an overcovering made of sacking from the stable,— oat-bags with arms and neck cut through. Therefore Melindy and Eulalia were compelled, by Mammy's order, to keep them in the background as unornamental to the garden.

"We's sorry, Twinses," apologized Melindy, "'cause you-all is orful good teh he'p us, you sho' is. But white folks doan' lak teh see dem sackin' aprons you-all done inventioned. 'Tain't dat you doesn' look pritty. It's dess dat you looks so sort o' diffrunt."

The accommodating Twinses were content to serve unseen, consoling themselves with mulberries in the intervals of labor.

At the gate, Melindy and Eulalia took their seats behind their "counter." On the ground between the merchants' tiny chairs, was placed the "cash-box" for receiving pins,— the currency of the trade.

Tradition decrees that one scoopful of plain color,

two of white, half a scoopful of blend or some superior shading shall be given for a pin.

Behind the rose-trellis back of them, Eulalia and Melindy kept their reserve stock in their small wheelbarrow.

They were plutocrats on this day. For Euly had found in the sewing room a whole big bagful of colored scraps, of which all the dyes were aniline and "came off" easily. In addition to this great wealth, a hogshead of white beach sand had been sent to her from her father's country place on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico.

Of this store, Eulalia, with characteristic amiability, gave lavishly to those who had to depend for supplies upon the scouring sand sold by the grocer.

Therefore, she felt the sharp tooth of ingratitude as well as the sting of slandered innocence, when envious Rosa Flemming falsely accused her of those improper business practices of which she herself was notoriously guilty.

"Doan' you worry about dat-ar Rosy, honey," consoled Melindy. "Ef she tries teh fuss an' quar'l, we'll jess say real sweet an' quiet,—'Let dogs delight teh bark an' bite.' Ma teacher teached me dat, an' it alluz makes eve'ybody so mad dat dey goes home right quick."

"Mother said we should be *kind* to her," sighed Eulalia.

"Yas'm. We jess got teh smirk an' smile an' keep peaceable. But ef dat li'l sinner comes 'round hyeah

slam-bangin' her tongue 'bout you, honey lamb, seems teh me lak I kin keep de peace better *inside* de house until she's done gone."

Euly nodded gravely. She knew Melindy's impulsive temperament.

"Yas, indeedy. De bes' way teh truly lub some people is teh keep 'em at a distance," added Melindy.

"There," said Eulalia, putting a bunch of pink roses on the table, "isn't this a *beautiful* store? And I never saw anything as lovely and delessis — lussus — delicious as that gold-and-silver mixture. It was just dear of Cousin Nathalie to save us those little pieces of gold and silver paint. I know it will make a sensetation."

"Sensetation?" asked Melindy doubtfully.

"Well," blushingly replied Euly, who was learning the charm of language, "maybe that is not essackly right. But you know what I mean, Melindy."

"Um-um, yas'm. An' dat's all any word kin be expected to do, Missy dear. Let's ring de bell, now, and let de neighbors know we is ready. Huh! Hyeah comes dat Miss Rosy right now."

"Oh! please stay, Melindy! Oh! Dear me! I hope she won't fuss. Oh! Good morning, Rosa!"

Rosa Flemming was a tawny-haired, spindly little girl, with snapping black eyes and a sharp little nose full of freckles.

She was in a conciliatory mood this morning and looking for bargains. For she had suffered business reverses. A pailful of good sand had been spoiled

in the unsuccessful experiment of using tomato catsup as a dyestuff, and maternal generosity, departing for the shops in a combined huff and hurry, had neglected to replenish with pins the depleted exchequer.

"My, but that gold-and-silver sand is pretty! How do you sell it? I have only ten pins — Mother forgot to give me more and she won't let me take them without asking. Give me ten pins' worth of the gold-and-silver."

Poor Eulalia! She was loth to part with so much of her chief pride and treasure to one customer and that one the first to call! But she had promised not to be hostile to Rosa. So while her lip trembled,— Eulalia's mouth still retained its baby, blossomy tenderness — she reluctantly scooped out more than half of the shimmering grains and gave them to Rosa.

Melindy shut her lips tightly and scrutinized Rosa's pins with care.

Rosa bristled.

"Those pins are straight and new, I'd have you know, Melindy!" she said sharply.

"So dey is; so dey is. Dat's why you ought not to care ef I look at dem so close. So dey is, all straight an' new excep' dis-yer bow-legged one, an' we'll overlook him 'cause he's had troubles enough. Good-by, Missy Rosy! — Huh!" Melindy continued, *sotto voce*, as their patron departed. "Ma pleasantness war jess about going under water fo' de third time. It's a blessin' Miss Rosy didn't stay no longer."

Rosa did not remain because her shrewd little brain was busy with an idea. Rosa was born for high finance. She became for the time an itinerant tradeswoman, went from sand store to sand store and sold a great part of the gold and silver treasure for twice the number of pins it had cost her. The proceeds she applied to purchasing the bright particular glory of another stand. This system she continued until she owned "the best the market afforded," which she combined into beauties beyond the dreams of avarice. Her consequent sand-shop was the last word in brilliancy and success. All on a primary capital of ten pins, one of them "bow-legged"!

The complete legitimate business that Eulalia and Melindy had prepared with such great labor sank into insignificance. The disgruntled proprietors were ready to weep with perplexed vexation. Scarcely any one came to them. All crowded about the young manipulator of finance and mistress of industry.

"Doesn't seem teh me dat Miss Eulaly an' Melindy is makin' out very good wif dey store," said Remus in the background to her brother. "Does you think dey is, Ramus?"

"Huh!" answered Ramus grumpily, "I dunno. I doan' think nothin'. What's de use ob me thinkin' when I ain't got-teh think?"

"Well, you doan' see nobody comin' teh buy, does you, Ramus?"

"Looky hyah, gal! *You* doesn' see dem, does yeh?" Ramus repeated the question. "Well, how-

come I got better sight den you is? Ef you doan' see, I doan' see, an' ef you-'n-I doan' see, den dey ain' seeable. An' I doan' want-a be bothered lookin' fo' nobody whar I doan' see. I'se got mos' 'nough trouble now, tellin' Maw an' Teacher an' ev'body else all 'bout what I *does* see."

"I'm very unhappy, Melindy," Eulalia was saying. "It's such a pretty sand-store! I wish I'd thought not to put all the gold and silver out on the table!"

"Us folks shorely must learn teh take our second thoughts first, 'cause dey is gin'ally more betterer," agreed Melindy.

"Nebber min', honey," she continued comfortingly, "dat ole Missy Rosy'll overreach herse'f yit. We-all 'ill git de customers hyah atter all. I forespeak dese words an' you'll remember 'em!"

Gerald Haviland came by on his way to the car and stopped at the gate for a moment, as was his matinal custom, to smell the pungent, invigorating aroma of roses that hung over the place,— like a tangible blessing, the General used to say.

"Hullo!" he cried, spying the patient young shopkeepers. "Business doesn't seem very brisk. Why don't you advertise?"

"What d'ye mean,— advertise?" demanded Eulalia.

"Will dat do any good, Marse Gerry? How does you work it, please, sah, boss?" asked her more practical assistant.

Gerald put a pink rose in his buttonhole, thinking of its clear resemblance to the pinky, baby beauty of Eulalia's upturned face, and twinkled smiles down upon them.

Encouraged by his manner, Melindy told her story of the morning's failure.

"An' you ain't got no notion how we-uns done worked ober dis-yer sand, Marse Gerry. We pretty near biled ourselves and Miss Euly done got her bes' pink apron stained, an' I dropped Sis Suky's big kitchen spoon in de hogshead of sand an' it sinked 'way down teh de middle, wif us a turnin' de sand up so. An' Sis made me go dig in atter it an' I tried teh go in wif ma heels fo'most an' dat didn' do. So den I tried a-gwine in wif ma head fo'most an' I nearly got drownded an' li'l Marse Pete an' li'l Marse Eustace an' Missy 'Lalia had teh drag me out by ma feetses. An' den dis-yer ole Rosy Flemming to come hoodooin' our buyerses away!"

Gerald, the architect, had a large sketching pad under his arm. He laughingly sat on the carriage-block and began to move his pencil busily, the children watching in wonder.

"There!" he called, "we'll test the power of modern business methods. Let's see. I almost always have some thumb-tacks in my pocket. Ah!"

And he fastened to the fence a placard:

NEW COLORS
A *WHOLE LOT* OF EACH
MAKE YOUR OWN MIXTURES
IT'S MUCH MORE FUN.

"Now, when some young person intellectually advanced enough to read, elucidates that announcement to an admiring public, there ought to be a change in your prospects," he said as he left them,— Eulalia in awe, Melindy in ecstasy at the string of great big words.

Soon, indeed, the white placard attracted attention. Soon small groups of children gathered about it, listening to their most educated members as they read it aloud. Soon the message gained sway.

"Tha's true," lisped Elsie Labuys, "'tis the mostest fun to make the mixtures all yourself. I wish I hadn't bought so many already mixed from Rosy."

"And it *is* good to have a lot of each kind. Rosa Flemming has nothing but *crumbs*," said Saidee, an acknowledged leader.

The tide turned. Smiles and dimples reappeared in the pink cheeks and the brown, as Eulalia and Melindy joyfully served their steady stream of admiring customers.

They were in the act of triumphantly clearing away empty tables and "cash-box" full of shining pins, when they saw Agostine Du Fossat turn the street corner and advance quickly toward them.

"Cl'ar de path!" exclaimed Melindy. "Hyah comes Miss 'Gostine on a run. Nebber seen nothin' like dese-yer French gals. Dey is either quicker dan lightnin' or slower dan cole molasses. Dey nebber jess walks,— alluz a-runnin' like mad or a draggin' deir feets. Mohnin', Miss 'Gostine! — Oh! — Does

you feel bad, Miss 'Gostine? Lemme he'p you in de house!"

For Agostine's face was ashen, her hands trembling and her fragile little figure swaying pathetically.

"Thanks. 'Tis nothing. Nathalie! — Is Miss Nathalie within?"

"Cousin Nathalie!" The scream of frightened Eulalia brought Nathalie to the window. Quick as the light she always seemed to embody, Nathalie darted downstairs and to the door to meet Agostine and her two anxious pages.

One glance into Agostine's tragic face, then, "Come in to me, honey," said the soft, steady voice, sympathetically, as the cool, strong young hands took hold of the fluttering nervous ones. "Come in, Tina mia, and tell it to Nathalie."

The touch of Nathalie was like the touch of the earth to the mythical Grecian hero,— new strength sprang from it. Agostine smiled.

"'Tis for that I am come, carità!"

"Have some iced tea sent at once to my room, Melindy," said Nathalie, "with plenty of mint in it. You shall sit in the great big wicker chair, little Tina, and rest and have some tea, and then tell me, *slowly*. Come!"

Agostine sat intensely upright in the lounging chair and scarcely touched the refreshing tea and yet she relaxed more and more as she told her story to Nathalie's eager interest and alert sympathy.

It was a tragic, sordid little tale.

Monsieur Du Fossat, a lawyer of a defunct old school, a lawyer all but briefless, his income decreasing, seemingly in exact proportion as the cost of living increased, had been tempted a few years before to invest in trade. If he had taken this step openly and asked advice of more practical friends, men of affairs, all would have been well. But the Du Fossats shared, with some others of the once-great old French and Spanish families who had for so long held Louisiana from "Americanization," the antiquated feeling that ordinary commerce was degrading and *déclassé*. Therefore, acting secretly, he had fallen a prey to the guile of a fraudulent commission broker, who was supposed to represent large Northern interests. Monsieur Du Fossat, the silent partner, had been called upon again and again to bolster up the firm's affairs.

"But," said Agostine at this point, "each time, this Mr. Warden would insist that soon the profits would be immense.. 'Immense' was his exact word to my poor, poor father. Now, all he has saved for years, it is gone! But that is not the terrible thing. I am not to be shaken by mere poverty." The daughter of the Du Fossats drew herself up proudly.

"Poor baby!" thought Nathalie.

"But oh! my dear! — *Mon Dieu! hélas!* — this wretch, this criminal of a man, he has not at all a legitimate business. He has taken many fine and valuable samples and has sold them and he has not rendered an accounting or moneys, and many other

bad things which I understand not he has done. And now he is daily watched. They have sent a lawyer from New York. If all is not made right this week, he shall be arrested, put in the jail, and my dear father,— a Du Fossat! — his partner! Now, no one knows they are partners; but it will come to be known when they take the books and see. In the public court! Maybe — maybe — oh! I cannot say it — I cannot — him too they will take." And Agostine burst into wild sobbing.

"My mother is locked in her room with *sal volatile*. I cannot let the servants see me weep. I have promised not to tell,— I am now breaking my word to my poor father. But,— I cannot keep it alone any longer! What shall we do! What shall we do, Nathalie! — His old friends all are men of high honor — they will cast him off — even General Haviland — Ger-Gerald's uncle will scorn us — Gerald too, perhaps,— they must not know. And, oh! Nathalie, all the time none is really more honorable than my father. He is honor itself! But they will not understand. How can these things be!

"You must never tell what I have told you. Never! Promise! Or I shall die!"

"Surely, I promise. Surely, Tinalina; now be still, my dear, be quiet. Wait, we shall be guided."

"Where to be guided? What can be done? We could sell the house,— it is my mother's. But who will buy that old place, within a week? And it is already mortgaged all it can be. That was done to

send my brothers to the college. Poor lads — they did not know! Now they will have such a return home! After all we have sacrificed, they will not have their professions. And they will have to make explanations for their father. They honor and admire him so — what a blow to all for him to tell them! It will — break — my — father's heart! He will not live to do it, Nathalie. A Du Fossat! I know he will not live!" She started up in terror at the thought.

"My dear! My dear! Agostine!" soothed Nathalie. Then, after a little, "Would it not be better to tell one close friend — George or Judge de Villiers or General Haviland — and get help than to have every one know later, so wretchedly?"

"Who could help? How could we honestly take so much help,— so many thousands with no prospects of ever paying,— except maybe after years, if the boys are fortunate?"

Agostine's sunken eyes filled, her poor drawn little face twitched pitifully and the tiny hands beat a nervous tattoo on the broad arms of the wicker chair.

Nathalie's faith was sturdy. She turned to the sunlit window and prayed silently, standing.

The thing, she thought, to be most avoided was that proud Monsieur Du Fossat,— the idol of his children — should have to be humbled, even temporarily, in the eyes of his sons. She could see the boys in her imagination, straight and young, so full of ambition and idealism and pride in the honorable

Du Fossat tradition. She had always been fond of them both.

Her resolution was made.

"Agostine," she said, "now don't go up through the air at what I'm about to suggest. Think it over first. I have five thousand dollars in the bank. I am not allowed to touch my little capital — but that five thousand was left out of the funds for my education. I can do as I like with it. I haven't any need of it."

"Father would not borrow from a girl!" said Agostine proudly, albeit a little faintly at the mere thought of possible relief. "And — anyway — you darling! — do you think I would take all of your money?"

"Father need not know!" Nathalie was fired with earnestness and the eager altruism of youth, "And you have nothing to say about it. Silence! Where is this lawyer?"

"Hélas! I do not know and I doubt if it could be done without my father's consent. So you cannot help, generous Nathalie!"

Nathalie bent her brows in thought. The little picture of despair sat rigid.

Voices floated up from the garden.

"Yas'm, Miss Carrie. We didn' hab no mo' success a-sellin' our pretty sand dan ef we wuz a-sellin' tickets to de dentist's. But we kep' a-hopin' an' a-tryin'. Nothin' beats a trial but a failure. And, pretty soon, plumb out ob de Hebbins, 'long come

Marse Gerald, steppin' along, an' he says, 'Why doan' you use modern business ways?' An' he wrote us out a cyard dat tole de chilluns all 'bout our sand bein' de bes', an' he tacked it up on de fence. An' we done got dem chilluns teh come buy quick as licketty-split after dat. If you ebber hab any business troubles, Miss Carrie, honey, doan' fergit Marse Gerald."

Agostine wrung her hands wretchedly at that last sentence, so significant to her.

But Nathalie started and stood poised in thought. Then she clapped her hands silently, rejoicingly, took courage and put on her hat.

"Shh! No questions! Never mind!" she said cheerily, in answer to Agostine's marveling expression. "Rest here or run along home, honey. I have an idea. Take hope — not too much hope, but hope! No, I'll tell nothing yet — it is just a chance. Of course I'll reveal no secrets, goosie! We're going to apply modern methods — so modern they've never been tried! Will you stay here?"

"Oh, no! I must go home to poor little Mother," said Agostine, rising to meet Nathalie's kiss.

"Well, wait just a little. I will order the horses. Lewis shall drive you home, honey. I cannot let you take the street-car, to-day, childy. Cheer up, dear. I think I see a light!"

Nathalie all but ran to General Haviland's cottage. trying hard to compose her tell-tale face.

The General was working in his exquisite garden

of pale-blooming plants. He was untwining a too ambitious pale yellow rose-vine from the branches of the porcelain-pink crepe-myrtle.

"Why, here's our lass!" he cried, lifting his great linen shade hat gallantly and coming quickly forward to open the gate for her. "Here's our lass, bright as the morning!"

Nathalie smiled in relief that he did not read her anxiety. But soon, "No,— there's a cloud over the sun. What is it, dear?" asked the keen-eyed General.

"Nothing concerning me, sir. One of my friends has had a sorrow. A secret, General Haviland! And she has been telling me about it. I've run over to learn whether Gerald is coming home for luncheon to-day. I know he often does when he has been uptown inspecting the building of houses he's designed. Yes? He is coming? Oh, good! Please ask him to come to see me for a little while before he goes down-town again. I've something for him to do,— very important."

"Can't I help?" asked Dr. Robert, coming out upon the porch. "Won't I do?"

Nathalie never realized how deeply Agostine's trouble had entered her own soul, until Robert asked that. The tears welled up in her eyes — those happy eyes that seldom held tears for herself — and she trembled with the yearning to throw her perplexity upon Robert's quiet strength and rest in the protection of this known though unavowed young lover.

"No," she smiled. "Thank you, Robert. This is Gerald's job. I must get home now. *A rivederci!*"

"Do you think there is trouble, Uncle?" asked Robert in alarm, when she had gone.

"Oh, no! Her tender heart is torn over some other girl's woes," answered the General, smiling. "Some little passing disappointment, I dare say. Girls feel things so."

But Robert was troubled. Nathalie's eyes — he knew, although she seldom dared lift them to his in these sweet, tremulant days — did not wear that anxious look for any light grief.

Gerald arrived as the two were beginning their luncheon, and received from the General his message that Nathalie wished to see him.

"I'll go right after luncheon," he said and took his seat.

But, "I should," said Robert. "It seems some friend of Nathalie's is in trouble. It looked to me as if Nathalie thought it very real trouble. Why, Gerry! Eat your luncheon first!"

"Some friend of Nathalie's," to Gerald's preoccupied mind, could mean only Agostine. He turned very pale, rose, apologized to his uncle, and left his luncheon untasted.

"I'll be fed down-town, later," he called from the porch.

"Why, what *is* up?" wondered the Doctor, disturbed.

"Oh! Youth! Youth!" the General replied, reassuringly.

Then he leaned toward him and placed his hand over Robert's. "My boy," he said gravely, "it seems he still cares for our lass."

The eager Nathalie met Gerald at the rose-embowered gate.

"Thank you, Gerry," she said. "Come into the round arbor. Hist!" she added with a gay note of mystery, "I would speak with you alone."

Gerald wondered with a little dismay at her choosing the round arbor for their tête-à-tête. The place was full of memories of their youthful, outworn sweethearting. He had not been in the round arbor with Nathalie since what had seemed at the time a tragic parting.

Nathalie — the light upon her soft hair and the flickering sunbeams and leaf-shadows marking her white frock — turned to him with direct simplicity.

"Gerald,— brother,— trust my motives and answer me sincerely. I have brought you to this spot where whatever old, spent sentimentalities there may be, heap all their influences upon you. For I want your answer to stand their test and be sure.

"You have — as I hope — entirely wide-awakened from your old boyish dream concerning me? That is true,— brother Gerald?"

"That is true,— sphinx. What riddle is this?"

"It is truly important. Trust me. And continue to be frank. Gerald, do you love Agostine? Oh!

Believe I am not impertinent, and tell me. That is true?"

"That is true."

"Deeply, Gerald? Enough to make sacrifices to keep her from pain? Enough to share any loss, sorrow, or disgrace even? You are sure?"

"I am sure."

"Then — I will tell you. She loves you too, Gerald."

"Nathalie! Nathalie! How do you know? Why do you tell me! Are you certain?"

"Wait a bit for the raptures, lucky boy. Now, listen. I must go carefully, and speak cryptically and not reveal secrets. But if you trust my judgment as well as my sincerity, if you desire to save our Agostine from misery, listen closely, do just what I say and without delay."

"I promise, Nathalie the Wise. Oh, child, speak quickly!"

"Then go to-day,— at once — to Monsieur Du Fossat and ask his permission to offer marriage to Agostine. You look as if that would not be hard! — Well, now listen well. He will doubtless be very wretched, will say that he desires you for a son-in-law, but that there are miserable reasons which forbid."

"Why, Nathalie!"

"Sh! Listen. Gerald,— if you love our little Tina, insist upon knowing the reasons. He will assure you, of course, that they reflect in no way

upon you or yours. Still insist. Say that you must know, that your happiness depends upon it, that Tina loves you,— I vouch for that! — that he owes it to you to tell, that you will be mute as the grave. Say — and get this part right, do! — that whatever sorrow or even disgrace could come to him you would have to share because, if he truly approves of you, as he says,— you are determined to be his son-in-law. Nothing external shall prevent. Therefore you have a right to help if you can.

"Oh! Gerald, dear, as you love Agostine, do not leave until he tells you. Do not leave until he lets you help. 'Ask me no more.' You *will* do all this, Gerry?"

"I will, of course, Nathalie. No one who knows your true heart and wise, good head, dear girl, could hesitate. I think I have my lesson aright,— though I'd risk any *gaucherie* or blunder for Agostine's sake. But I feel like a man in a fairy-tale."

"The prince, come to the rescue! Good boy, Gerry dear! I knew you would obey. I'm Fairy Godmother. One thing more. If you should find, by any chance, that you need more money than you have at hand —"

"Why, Nathalie!"

"Patience! Remember we have been brother and sister all our lives"— here Nathalie blushed a glorious flood of color —" and I have five thousand dollars at your service."

She ran past him.

"Blest be your quest, Sir Knight!" she called from the door of the arbor.

Melindy was sitting alone in the kitchen, shelling peas. Nathalie ran to her and clasped her in her arms.

"Oh! Melindy! We have done it, I think! I think we have found a way. Thank you, wise baby!"

"You're welcome," said Melindy politely. "What smaht thing is you an' me done done, Miss Nat'lie? What has I done did, fo' you to thank me so pretty?"

"Taught me, when I had business troubles, not to forget Marse Gerald!" laughed Nathalie. "I *had* business troubles and I sent for him and I think he's going to fix them."

"Da's right," dimpled Melindy. "He's a good, smaht business man, he is. I recommend him, I does. A li'l bit light-steppin' wif his tongue sometimes, but a mighty kine young man.

"An' so's Marse Robert, Miss Nathalie. *Nex'* time, maybe, us kin send fo' young Marse Rob."

"Oh! Melindy, Melindy, perhaps next time, we can!"

CHAPTER X

SUGAR AND SPICE

EAGERLY Nathalie watched for her fellow-conspirator's return, growing more and more hopeful as the hours went by.

For she felt that the delay must indicate prolonged activity and, therefore, not despair. Either Gerald was still pleading with M. Du Fossat or acting as his acknowledged protector.

Therefore, although Gerald did not reappear at all that day or evening, Nathalie went to sleep with a light heart, predicting happiness.

Early next morning Gerald joined her as she sat with her sewing on the broad white porch.

"Saved!" he called reassuringly. "We're not quite out of the woods yet, but all real danger is averted. 'I'll tell you all I can.'" He perched upon the porch railing, against festoons of the Marechal Niel rose vine.

"I can't talk about it with perfect freedom, because M. Du Fossat doesn't know you know, of course. He'd perish if he suspected. Equally of course, he expects me to keep silent. And I *don't* know how much you *do* know.

"It took hours to make him confide in me. Poor

old gentleman! What a rare spirit he has, and what an infant he is! But — at last he let me save the situation. And I did."

"Oh! Gerald!"

"Only — here's the rub — he insists I'm not to say a word of wooing to Agostine until he has paid back all that it cost to arrange this affair. You see his viewpoint, of course. Judging by all the indications — and I am an optimist — that will happen when all these endearing young charms that so indifferently you gaze on to-day have retired on half-pay.

"Don't laugh, Nathalie. I'm really horribly anxious about it. What will Agostine think? She won't know how I — feel about her, and —"

"Oh! ho! It's good discipline for you to have to repress your exuberant expressions for a little while, Gerry. Melindy said to Suky,— they didn't know I was in the garden,— that my Japanese wind-bell is 'fo' all de worl' lak Marse Gerry Hav'land,— jess a-tinklin' pleasant all de time, but no pertickler tune to it.' The tune may be better for a little silence, Gerald."

"Yes, Teacher. Maybe it won't hurt to wait a *little* while. But to keep silent to Tina until Raoul and Auguste have been graduated and become highly successful lawyers and are able to assist their father financially, or to wait until M. Du Fossat recaptures enough long-departed clients! I'd have to understudy the sphinx. Oh! I wish I could hypnotize Mademoiselle Euphrosyne!"

Nathalie laughed. Mademoiselle Euphrosyne Du Fossat was Agostine's crotchety maiden aunt. She was very wealthy and lived in solitary and luxurious chagrin in a stately old house on the Esplanade. Occasionally she emerged to visit her relations, but some fancied indignity was sure soon to drive her back into retirement.

She had promised to pay for the education of the Du Fossat boys, but had been moved to recant because Agostine's visiting cards were found to read "Miss Agostine Du Fossat" instead of "Miss Agostine Euphrosyne Myrtilla Du Fossat," as she had been christened.

"Anybody with a sense of humor would rejoice that little Tina did shed some of that big name," said Gerald. "She used to rattle around in it. But the point is,— can't we hypnotize Mlle. Euphrosyne Myrtilla? If she would fulfill her pledge to reimburse M. Du Fossat for the boys' schooling — she's talked about this thing to everybody in her social world, so we can safely acknowledge it,— if she *would*, then M. Du Fossat could square this debt at once. I don't want the money, of course,— but I do want Agostine. And not even to be allowed see her as often as she'd let me! I suppose it would be too late for Agostine to have some new cards printed?"

"With a headline reading: *Erratum?*" laughed Nathalie, "and a footnote saying: *All previous issues hereby repealed?* Poor Miss Euphrosyne!

She's *not* popular. Melindy has been crying all the morning because she has to go there for an hour or two every day to help her in the garden. Oh! Must you go? Good-by, Gerry. I'm proud of you. And it's all coming right. You just wait.

"Why, Melindy, child! *You* crying! Whatever is the matter?"

"Well, Missy Nat'lie," sighed that tear-stained young person, coming up the porch steps and standing sadly before her, "how'd *you* like to work fo' a grunter lady?"

"For a *what*, child?"

"Fo' a grunter lady. Yas'm, das whar dis-yer Miss Euph'seen am. She grunts all de blessed time, 'bout ev'thin'. She come hyah to our house one day teh see Miss Carrie, an' Missy Euly held out her han' so pretty teh her,— and Miss Euph'seen she grunt an' say, 'Good manners but sticky fingers!' And you *know* li'l Miss Euly ain't nebber been a sticky-finger chile. An' once at breakfas' li'l Marse Eustace done shook her arm — jess a li'l bit — not meanin' it — an' make Miss Euph'seen spill some milk out ob her spoon on de table clof an' she gone grunt an' say, 'How horrid! Now I mus' eat ma cereal in a puddle!'

"An' now her li'l erran' boy done lef' fo' two weeks teh visit he granny on de plantation. An' she done ax Miss Carrie an' Sis Suky kin I come down dere on de street-cyars for a hour or two ebery day endurin' de time 'twell he gits back, an' he'p watah

her flowers. An' dey done say 'Yas,' I kin. An' I doan' *want-a*, Miss Nat'lie, honey!"

"Oh, childy, Miss Euphrosyne is really a very kind old lady, and if you are sweet and do right you'll have a good time there,— even if her manner is a little spicy."

"Well," said Melindy resignedly, "ef she's spice, I'll be sugar, an' see ef we cyan't cook up somethin' good between us. But de las' time I was dar I did try teh be sweet, an' she gib me a lubly rose she done growed by grafting one bush on anudder bush, some way. An' she ax me so proud, 'M'lindy, does you know who made dat lubly rose you got?' An' I say, 'Yas'm, de good Lawd made her,' an' she done grunt an' went in de house mad as a hornet.

"She's a plumb curious ole lady, dat-ar Miss Euph'seen is."

Nevertheless Melindy was forced to obey the summons, an unwilling sacrifice. For Miss Carrie did not dare offend the sensitive old lady by refusal and Sis Suky thought it would be good for her ward to be somewhere, for a little while, "whar ev'ybody warn't spoilin' her teh death all de time."

The actual departure in the afternoon gave Melindy a pleasant sense of importance. She wore her little new pink pinafore and carried a big brown paper bag containing a ball of twine, wire and her own little garden shears.

Her pride was much gratified, too, by the awe of Remus and Ramus who followed her to the street-car,

deeply impressed by her going off all alone to work for Miss Euphrosyne.

"Melindy's gwine teh be a sho'-'nough gardener; ain't she, Ramus?" asked Remus.

"How does I know what she's a-gwine-a be? Come 'long back home soon, Melindy."

"A'right, Twinses; soon's I kin git free. Goo' bye, Twinses! Thanky, Twinses!" and Melindy jumped on the car and was borne away.

Miss Euphrosyne's cook, a quiet, dignified old negress, met her unsmilingly at the kitchen door.

"Go 'long upstairs teh Miss Euph'seen's settin' room," said she in answer to the child's pretty greeting. "She's been a-wonderin' whar kep' you. You got-teh step lively ef you want-a stay 'round dese diggin's."

Melindy was sorely tempted to reply that she had no desire whatever to remain; but politeness was natural to her and really had its seat in her good little heart. Nobody ever had a truer desire to "be pleasant." So she hazarded another smile at the unresponsive Aunt Clem and betook herself quickly upstairs.

"I ain' a-gwine-a argify wif Aunt Clem," she said to herself. "Reckon I'll hab all I kin do teh look out fo' Miss Euph'seen."

That tart old lady sat in the bay-window of her white-and-lavender boudoir, admiring the effect of her new wistaria-pattern carpet.

"Come in!" she said crisply in reply to Melindy's

timid knock. "Look out for the carpet. Don't step on the white; step on the lavender."

Melindy picked her way carefully across the design and stood before her.

"Are you hungry, child?"

"No'm. Thank you, ma'am. Ain' dis-hyeah a pritty room!"

"H'm'm!" said Miss Euphrosyne. And thought it evident that Melindy was allowed too much latitude in speech.

"Sort of sets off yo' pritty silvery hair so gentle," pursued Melindy.

"Hm'm!" said Miss Euphrosyne with the ghost of a smile and thought the child had eyes in her head anyway.

"Das whar I alluz says teh ma Missy Euly," Melindy prattled on, "I says, 'Miss Euph'seen's purples alluz puts me in mind ob a mornin'-glory'" — Melindy was too diplomatic to add that the full quotation was, "a mornin'-glory wif a bee inside of it."

"Hm'm!" said Miss Euphrosyne, smiling broadly and deciding that Melindy was a very mannerly little pickaninny after all.

"Come along downstairs, now, and I'll show you what's to be done in the garden."

Melindy knew that she had scored. For the observant young philosopher was wont to say, "Nebber min' what folkses *says* teh you. Look in deir eyes fo' yo' answer. You kin' fin' out mo' what a pusson

means from de looks in deir eyes dan you kin from de words outer deir moufs."

Her discipline, however, began early.

"Fill the two watering-cans," said Miss Euphrosyne, "and bring them to me. We'll begin on the shady side of the house and water the sunny side last, when the sun is low. As fast as I empty one can, fill it again. Don't spill the water. Don't let the faucet run. Walk,— don't dance. And don't talk or sing while working."

Dutifully Melindy suppressed her agile feet and active tongue. Dutifully she maintained a cheerful expression, thinking all the while, "Got teh keep awful still. I didn' know I wuz a-comin' teh church."

Miss Euphrosyne's garden was not difficult to care for. It was what Melindy called "a lazy garden," — composed chiefly of ferns, geraniums and such hardy plants as, in the moist, balmy climate of Louisiana, needed little or no cultivation.

The watering over, Miss Euphrosyne entrusted Melindy with gathering huge masses of pink geranium blooms for the vases and jars throughout the house.

Melindy, accustomed to Miss Carrie's naturalistic method of flower arrangement, began snipping off the heavy headed blossoms with generous stems of varying length.

"Wait, child!" cried her employer in dismay. "Take this little rule and see that all the stems are just the same length. I like the bouquets in *my*

vases to be very smooth and even. There are entirely too many things at loose edges nowadays. Look at your shoe-strings now. I've noticed that you have one shoe laced over-hand and one under. Why is that?"

Melindy looked at her shoes questioningly. "I dunno, Miss Euph'seen. I reckon dey isn't no *why* to it. Does it make me walk kine o' lop-sided, does you think?"— rather hoping for an affirmative reply.

"Certainly not. But be careful to have them right another time. Now, snip!"

Soon the day's task was over and Melindy went homeward well established in Miss Euphrosyne's good graces and not entirely dissatisfied with her new employment.

"She's kind o' picky, but not pecky," she explained to Suky. "She talks lak words wus scarce, but she doan' grunt as much es I expected."

Next afternoon Melindy relaced and retied her shoes with scrupulous care and returned toward the Esplanade in good time.

But — alas! — she had not gone far on her way before she encountered with a mixture of piquant pleasure and dismay her arch enemy, Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche, the Boy from Back of Town, who worked at Du Fossats'.

"Why doan' you smile at me, honey?" he demanded teasingly.

"'Cause ef *I* gits pleasant, *you* gits so sassy, boy. An' I jess has teh stand fo' yo' shortcomin's ef I helps you to dem."

"You'se a mighty sassy gal, yo'se'f."

"G'long, boy! You's a triflin' nigger. Lemme by! I'se got teh go do ma work fo' Miss Euph'seen."

"She's de las' pusson on dis yearth, *I'd* do any work fo'. She jess lets our pore li'l Miss 'Gostine set an' cry all de time,— when she thinks nobody ain' lookin'. Reg'lar ole pepper-pot!"

Melindy had a fine sense of loyalty.

"Shet up, boy!" said she, "Miss Euph'seen doan' make Miss 'Gostine cry 'tall. She doan' nebber go' teh de Du Fossats' 'tall. I done heard Miss Carrie say so."

"No;— da's jess it. *I* done heard Miss 'Gostine cry to herse'f, 'All our trouble would be ober ef Aunt Euph'seen would come back an' keep her word!' Now, den! When you gwine-a be ma gal?"

"Doan' wait fo' dat day," said Melindy, "you might wear out yo' patience in about a million years. G'bye, boy!"

Melindy went on her way smiling at her own successful rejoinder. But she was troubled. She had felt Miss Agostine's sorrows in the wind, had seen her distress when she had come to Nathalie for comfort. Could it be possible that Miss Euphrosyne really was responsible?

Melindy quickened her steps as she approached Miss Euphrosyne's house. For she feared that she was late.

Miss Euphrosyne thought so too, and stood waiting in the garden with a grim look of disapproval on her face.

"What kept you?" she snapped.

"I — I did," timidly replied the truthful Melindy.

"Haven't you been taught the value of promptness?"

"Yas'm. But it's much easier teh teach me dan it is fo' me teh learn," sighed Melindy, ruefully.

Miss Euphrosyne smiled. "Get the cans," said she grimly, "and make up for the delay by hurrying now."

Melindy's thoughts would have greatly astonished the crotchety lady, could she have read them. The observant child had seen her smile and decided, "No; she *didn'* mean teh hurt Miss 'Gostine. She ain't real sour; jess a li'l bit curdled."

When Melindy came down the path with the filled cans, however, she very nearly changed her verdict for a more severe one.

Miss Euphrosyne's eyes were blazing and her hands clenched and her lips pressed close. Another tall old lady, leaning on a cane, stood before her, talking vehemently.

"You may like it, or you may leave it, Euphrosyne," she was saying, "but I tell you it is shameful, shameful! I know that Agostine would have

been asked to be Lucia Pemberly's bridesmaid, only Lucia felt that it would be too great a sacrifice for Mme. Du Fossat to buy her a frock. The whole family is sacrificed for the boys' education. And I know well that Du Fossat has had some sort of business trouble and that young Gerald Haviland helped him through it."

"That is not true, Alice Lamberton, and would be no business of yours if it were. Good-day to you!"

"I'm not going, Euphrosyne. If you go into the house I shall follow you there. It isn't my business, but it is yours and I-am-going-to-see-that-you-realize it,"— tapping the ground with her stick to emphasize every word. "I'd not say this to anyone else. But it's plain as day to me, living next door to Agostine and seeing her heart plainly on her sleeve, that she is fond of Gerald Haviland.

"If Haviland has loaned money to Du Fossat, you know as well as I do that the old blind badger won't let him approach Agostine until it's paid. It never will be paid!"

"How dare you!" shrilled Miss Euphrosyne. "How dare you! You insult me! Du Fossats always pay their debts."

"When they have the money, they do. And when they have rich and selfish relatives who care more for their own dignity than for their niece's happiness, they don't. And, now, good-day to *you*, Euphrosyne!"

And the frank and emphatic old lady limped down the path, leaving her outraged hostess blind with anger.

Miss Euphrosyne sailed past Melindy and her watering cans, into the house.

The child stood, perplexed. When Miss Euphrosyne did not return, she watered the garden alone, watered it with an appropriate accompaniment of tears from her sympathetic and emotional heart.

"Goodness," she thought, "I wush I'd-a stayed home, whar folks is happy an' kine. These hyah ole ladies suttinly is edgy enough teh cut yo' fingers on. Pore dear Miss Euph'seen! I wonders ef she *is* such a debbil?"

The garden seemed large to her unaided efforts. The sun had quite gone down when she had completed her task.

She dared not go home without being dismissed and she did not like to leave Miss Euphrosyne in tears without offering consolation.

She went into the kitchen to ask Aunt Clem's advice in her dilemma.

"Aunt Clem," she queried, "kin I go up teh see Miss Euph'seen?"

"No, you cayn't. Doan' you know Miss Euphrosyne's habbin' one ob her tantrums? Cayn't you hear her a-cryin' an' a-moanin' an' carryin' on, up dar? Nobody nebber goes nigh her when she's lak dat; an' doan' *you* do it!"

Crying and moaning and nobody near her! That

had a very desolate sound to the tender-hearted Melindy.

She waited until Aunt Clem had disappeared into the provision pantry. Then she boldly went through the house and up the stairs. No one should cry uncomforted when Melindy was in hearing.

Her fear of Miss Euphrosyne still made her drag her steps. But, perhaps, the deep, sweet secret of Melindy's light but universal charm lay near the fact that tears, repellent to most of us, were irresistible magnets to this comforting little soul.

Miss Euphrosyne lay on the bed,— a towel under her feet to protect the coverlet — very near hysteria, sobbing and crying aloud.

Melindy's knock was unheard. She squeezed through the half-opened door,— not daring to open it further unbid — and approached the bed on tiptoe.

"Please, ma'am, Miss Euph'seen," she said, "please, ma'am, let me comfort you!"

Miss Euphrosyne sat bolt upright and looked at her, looked in a sort of a daze. A strange bewildered sweetness came into her face. To comfort her! Nobody had thought of that, nobody had offered comfort or sincere liking to the lonely and formidable old lady in many, many years.

Miss Euphrosyne fell back upon her pillow and gave way to a flood of warm, quiet and quieting, normal tears. She held out her hand to Melindy.

Melindy stroked it gently in silence. When Miss Euphrosyne lay still and calm, she went softly to

the dressing table, found the inevitable bottle of *sal volatile*. This she brought to her patient, with a subdued enjoyment of the importance of her position.

"Miss Euph'seen," said she, "doan' you feel bad 'bout what Miss Lamberton said. She doan' un'erstan' dat you doan' know 'bout po' Miss 'Gostine. Nobody un-erstan's but me,— I'se dat smaht! I *knows* you jess wishes Miss 'Gostine an' her pa would come tell you when dey has troubles. Only you didn' think teh let 'em know you wished it."

Miss Euphrosyne's eyes opened wide at this insight. It was quite true. She who had made confidence difficult had felt aggrieved because she did not receive it. She had not believed it possible that the Du Fossats would get into real difficulties without appealing to her, though she knew that she had not made herself a ready subject for appeal.

"What do you know about Miss Agostine's troubles?" she asked sharply.

Had it come to this,— that the Du Fossats' affairs were discussed in kitchens?

"Nothin' much, honey, nothin' much," replied Melindy with quick intuition, "an' I on'y knows *dat* 'cause I'se so smaht an' I laks Miss 'Gostine,— an' you too, Miss Euph'seen. You is kine. You doesn' really lub to be prickly."

Miss Euphrosyne winced.

"What do you know about Miss Agostine?" she insisted.

Melindy told all she knew of Agostine's distress and illness during her hurried visit to Nathalie; how Nathalie had sent her home in the carriage; how she, Melindy, had seen Nathalie run at once to General Haviland's cottage and on her return wait eagerly for Gerald; how Melindy overheard Gerald say next day that *now* he could not see Miss Agostine, though all would be well if Miss Euphrosyne would only keep her promise. All of which had meant nothing consecutive to Melindy until her presence during Mrs. Lamberton's attack that morning.

"An' den, dat no-'count nigger boy ob Miss 'Gostine's, he shoot off his mouf a li'l bit, too. But none ob us is a-gwine-a pay no 'tention teh what *he* say.

"Now, honey, dear! It's jess 'cause dey doan' know how lubly and sweet you is dat dey's all so crazy. Why, eben Aunt Clem,— she say you didn't want nobody up hyah when you's cryin'. But I jess knowed you wuz pinin' for somebody teh lub you, ef 'twuz only po' li'l Melindy. Dis hyah's sech a big house teh be all alone in! Doan' you want me teh stop at Miss 'Gostine's on ma way home an' say dat you's feelin' poorly and wants yo' li'l niece teh come lub you?" .....

Miss Euphrosyne nodded.

She was seeing into her own soul, prickles and all, as she had never seen it before.

Her remorse was likely to be uncomfortable, her struggles with herself would probably be long and

hard. But she, too, saw in her own spirit the buried kindness and love-hunger that little Melindy found there. She determined to believe in and trust that vision.

The next afternoon when Melindy arrived to water the garden, Miss Euphrosyne lay in the hammock on the secluded porch. Mrs. Lamberton sat beside her, busy with some intricate embroidery.

Agostine Du Fossat stood at the gateway, receiving a box from the florist's boy.

"For me!" she cried delightedly. "It is addressed to me!"

She and Melindy mounted the steps together, Agostine opening the box in transit.

"Oh! Beautiful!" she cried, displaying a mass of exquisite orchids.

"From Gerald Haviland!" she said in an ecstatic whisper, lifting his card from the box.

"Oh! ho!" Mrs. Lamberton exclaimed, proudly, mysteriously. "You may thank *me* for that, Agostine!"

Miss Euphrosyne laid a warning finger across her lips and smiled — and winked — at Melindy.

CHAPTER XI

FOOD AND FAMINE

Mr. Mandeville's shyness was not overcome all at once. To the little ones, he was always hospitable, welcoming, extending his courtesy even to Remus and Ramus who often followed in Melindy's train.

The quiet hours in the dim library or the tangled garden became a part of the children's lives, an almost daily institution.

But their host still found sudden business in his study and locked himself into seclusion, when any adult member of the family was expected to come to take his guests to their home, and the visits of Miss Carrie and Marse George had never been returned by him.

Miss Carrie felt certain that only bashfulness now detained him. But Marse George,— whose professional experience reinforced a deep natural intuition and made him a wise judge of men,—perceived some other cause.

"I should say," said he, "that some suffering had given him a definite distaste of his kind, a distaste hard to overcome. It makes me sorry. I always feel as though something ought to be done about it. But one cannot intrude."

Mr. Mandeville's personality, even so faintly touched, had an appeal. There was a sweetness and helplessness about him quite unaccompanied by weakness. On the contrary, one felt a latent strength,—patience, self-control, endurance with an impression of something more militant behind them.

Indeed, Melindy expressed it well when she said, "Marse Mandeville's so tame an' gentle dat it wouldn' do teh let everybody ride him. Some folks would drive him too hahd an' hurt him an' *git* hurted. He doan' even know how teh scole you when you's bad. He scoles so polite lak a puffick stranger. Now ma Miss Euph'seen, she kin scole you lak you was her kin. She scoles lak her heaht was in it. But dis ar Marse Mandeville, he gits angry lak he couldn' bear de heat."

Her mistress and master were greatly astonished one evening when Mr. Mandeville's severe English butler came up the garden path and waited upon them upon the steps of the porch.

The evening was still and sweet. The jasmine and the roses breathed into the air without motion, the rising golden moon seemed to hang poised in the heavens and the silent servitor of Mr. Mandeville stood as motionless as the landscape, offering a letter to Marse George.

The letter was brief.

"I have to go away," it said. "Please manage my affairs until I return. All necessary documents herewith. Give Peter the *Wonder Book* I promised

him,— charge to me. Tell Melindy I hope she will learn to cook as I advised. Good wishes! If I do not return, you will find instructions."

Marse George,— as became the father of Eulalia, —was exceedingly scrupulous. He fulfilled his new client's instructions even to the detail of advising Melindy to learn to cook.

"Lawsy me!" sighed Melindy, "is dat a-axin' or a-bossin', Marse George? It jess does seem lak de mo' frien's you's got de mo' bossin' you has to endure. Marse Mandeville's a very classable gemp'man, teh be shore; — but I ain't nebber went teh school teh him, is I, Marse George? Sho' am funny, too! He wouldn' know good cookin' f'um bad; he's so dreamy. What claim is he got teh make a cook outen po' li'l me?"

"How did Mr. Mandeville come to discuss cookery with you?" asked her master.

"Lemme see, sah! I disremembers jess how-come dat-ar trouble commence. Oh! Yassah. I knows now! He ax us is we hongry, an' I 'lowed I was hongry; an' I sho' was! An' he done gin us some biscuits an' honey, an' I didn' care how I et up dem biscuits. But I warn't onmannerly, Marse George. Only I didn' *insult* dem biscuits none either. An' Marse Mandeville, he say, 'Does you lak biscuits, Melindy?' an' I says, 'Yassah!' an' he say, 'Li'l gals dat lubs biscuits ought teh know how teh make dem,' an' I says, 'Yassah!' But seems teh me, Marse George, lak I kin enjoy Sis Suky's biscuits now

a good deal more'n ef I had teh pound de dough.

"Jess lak once was a boy up on de plantation done lub teh hyear music so much dat a white lady gin him a cornet. An' atter dat he sot up ebery night tryin' teh ketch his bref through it; an' he ain' cotch his bref yit. De plantation's jess full up wif folkses es has dey opinion ob dat kine white lady.

"Is I talkin' too much, Marse George?"

"No, child," laughed her master.

"But," put in Miss Carrie, "Suky has long wished to teach Melindy a few simple facts about cooking. See if you cannot learn some before Mr. Mandeville's return; you can please Mr. Mandeville and Suky and me, too, by learning them, Melindy."

"Thanky, ma'am," said Melindy, smiling and sighing, "I'd do mos' anything teh please you, Miss Carrie, honey. Does I has teh eat what I cooks?"

Sis Suky, grateful for the pressure from without that gave her her long-sought opportunity, began the lessons at once. Therefore, when the Twins arrived at the kitchen door on the next afternoon, they found Melindy enveloped in a huge brown apron and so sticky with paste and sprinkled with sugar that she looked like a big and delectable *marron glacé*.

"Come in, Remus! Come in, Ramus!" she said proudly. "I'se takin' a cookin' lesson. Does you-all want teh learn, too?"

But, "No, 'ndeedy!" Sis Suky interjected severely, "I got ma kitchen messed up 'nough wif one li'l niggah; let alone three. You take dem tall stools

outen de closet, Ramus, an' sot dem up on de groun' *outside* de kitchen winder; an' dat'll bring you-all up high enough teh look in an' watch 'thout clutterin' up de place. An' doan' talk an' sturb Melindy. But you kin sing *De End Is Near*, ef you wants teh. How's yo' Ma?"

"She's well, thanky," said Remus.

"No'm, she ain't," said Ramus.

"How-come she ain't?"— Remus, indignantly.

"Ain' she done thought she had air-syrup-less in her laigs when she come home las' night? Tell me dat now, Remus!"

"Done *thought* she had it!" quoted Remus scornfully. "Her bofe foots itched, Miss Suky, but when she looked teh see what ailed 'em dey warn't nothin' dar but itch. She's a'right, thanky ma'am."

"H'mm, Ramus, chile," said Melindy, "cayn't go by thinkin's. Sis Suky thinks I'se makin' some food; but looks teh me lak I'se jess makin' a mess."

"You's makin' a heap ob was'e time," said Suky sternly. "Come on, now,— stir it up! So!— So! — So! Not s' fas'! Keerful! Alluz de same way! — So!"

Melindy sighed, "Ma ahm's most comin' off, Sis Suky, now."

"You Melindy, ef yo' *tongue* ain't wo' out long ago, I reckon yo' *ahm* kin stan' a li'l more usin'. Keep a-stirrin'!"

"I is, Sis Suky. I'se mos' wound it up tight. I never would-a eat nothin' in ma life ef I'd knowed

war sech a trouble," laughed Melindy, stirring. "Go 'long, Twinses! Sis Suky say you-all kin sing *De End Is Near.* I hope you-all is right about dat, too."

"Don't you make fun ob hymns, Melindy. Go on sing, Twinses!"

The Twins smiled broadly with pleasure at the invitation to show off their one social achievement. They shut their eyes tight. Remus bowed her head and Ramus bent his long neck backwards:

"Come along, sinners,
Quit an' come along!"

wailed Remus.

"'Cause you better stop an' hear—
De End is near!"

growled Ramus.

That was all. The song was done. The Twins opened their eyes and restored their heads to the perpendicular, and waited for applause.

But Suky only sighed, a deep mournful suspiration, and Melindy, holding her dimples in check, said naughtily, "Guess dey 'spec's ma cookin'll kill 'em, Sis. An' it sho' am killin' *me.*— It's stiff es a new shoe, now. What mus' I do wif it?"

The Twins looked their admiration and dutifully kept silent while Suky bustled about and instructed Melindy.

"Dat's right," said Suky proudly at last, putting li'l

the pan into the oven. "Now, den! You's learnin'. Dat sho' will please Marse Mandeville."

Melindy knit her brows. "How-come I got teh be a god-chile ob hisn, Sis Suky?" she asked.

"You's a bad gal, Melindy," Suky reproved. "You ought teh be glad Marse Mandeville takes a intrus' in you."

"Everybody lubs Melindy!" that popular young person exulted. "When is *ma* Marse Mandeville comin' home, Sis Suky?"

"How kin I know 'bout his goin's an' comin's? Now you kin go play. But be gentlefied an' doan' 'sturb de white folks."

Every few days the cooking lessons were continued, until Melindy had some triumphs to be proud of and began to take her usual joy in her own abilities.

"Wush Marse Mandeville'd come home," she said. "I'll sho' gib him a good feedin'. He'll be so glad dat I kin cook so pritty."

Marse George shared her desire for Mr. Mandeville's return. As the weeks went by without a sign or sound from his client, the words, "If I do not return, you will find instructions," began to alarm him with a sinister connotation. Had the old scholar's brooding, lonely life deranged him? Was he, perhaps, wandering and in danger,— or worse?

The English butler could cast no light upon the situation. His master had received a letter which had seemingly disturbed him. He had commanded him, the butler, to pack a small satchel, had made

it clear that all bills would be paid by his bank through Marse George, and had departed. He would doubtless return. The butler was not in the least perturbed.

Not so Melindy, who heard the continued absence of her patron discussed.

"Miss Nat'lie," she said, "you jess knows dat Marse Mandeville ain't no mo' fitten teh go 'round by hisself den li'l Missy 'Lalia is. It's unusuble fo' him teh go gallivantin'. An' dat powerful lot ob studyin' an' readin' he do ain' good fo' *nobody.* Sometimes folks gits so much sense it done overcome dey brain. Well'm, Melindy kin make a li'l cohn-pone fo' him, when he do come."

Burning to display her new art, Melindy brought one of her "own-made" corn-pones as a gift to General Haviland.

She found the General in his garden. It was early in the day and his riotous morning-glories boasted their pale splendor among the dark leaves and myriad shining blossoms of the white star-jasmine. "Night and Morning," Robert called their trellis. But General Haviland said it symbolized to him pale, fleeting hopes and the constant crown of all-day-long endeavor.

The General was gathering white roses. A great palmetto basket, filled with them, lay on the path beside him, and his garden shears snipped long clusters from the branch he was holding.

"The white roses of the South, multitudinous, gen-

erous, faulty,— so eager to bloom freely they cannot wait for perfection,— giving, giving, giving! Thorny, too, but prodigal in fragrance! How like your spirit, my poor Carlos!" mused the General aloud, unconscious of Melindy.

"Did you spoke, Gin'al Haviland?" she asked.

He blushed when he saw her and when he perceived her knowledge that his eyes were damp with tears.

"I have lost a friend, Melindy," he explained frankly. "A dear friend is dead. Come! You shall help me put these flowers beside his portrait."

Melindy's sympathy,— that teacher of true delicacy that makes her superlatively sympathetic race the richest of all peoples in tact and courteous restraint,— kept her from dwelling on her gift, the cornpone, at this pathetic moment.

She said merely, "Yassah, Gin'al. Thanky, sah. Jess wait a minute while I brings de cook dis-ar cohnpone I done made you."

She helped the General pile the mass of roses before a faded old portrait, taken in the earlier days of the photographic art.

A tall, slender, dark man,— very young in the very old portrait,— with fire in his pose, fire in his kindling glance, fire in his grip upon the carved-ivory-headed riding-whip he carried, fire in the backward sweep of his waving hair, stood before her. The spirit was so glowing, the action of the young figure so alight, that the years that faded the picture had brought no dimness to the impression of the subject.

"It has been twenty years since we met,— nay! nearer thirty!" said General Haviland.

And Melindy surprised him by replying, "Dat's queer. 'Cause I'se jess shore I'se done seen dat gempman somewhars. An' he warn't a *ole* gempman, neither."

"Impossible!" said General Haviland.

But Melindy knew that she had seen those luminous, piercing eyes, those proudly smiling lips, that black cloud of hair defiant of conventional restrictions.

"I'se sorry fo' you, Gin'al Haviland, I sho' is," she said. "I'se kind o' feared I'se los' a frien', too. I ain' quite los' him yit, but I'se kind o' feared I'se losin' him."

The courtly General gave condolence in his turn.

"Is your little friend ill, Imp?" he asked kindly.

"I dunno, sah. He ain't here. He's jess gone. An' it ain't a li'l frien', Gin'al. Ain't you heard tell dat ma frien', Marse Mandeville, done disappeared away?"

"Mandeville! Mandeville!" the General shouted, "not Mr. Ebers Mandeville! Present the report!" commanded the old soldier, using military phrase in his excitement.

Melindy, in her element as the instigator of apparent sensation, told the General about the strange departure of her friend and patron, and Marse George's consequent anxiety.

The General got his cane and soft Confederate

hat, while she was telling the story, and then, without another word to Melindy, accompanied her home.

Marse George stood in the doorway surrounded by the family in the midst of their morning ceremony of leave-taking.

"I done fotched Gin'al Haviland," announced Melindy.

"George," said the General laconically, "you must give me a moment. Concerning Ebers Mandeville. Thank you, I *will* sit down; it's a long story. Stay, of course, Caroline and Nathalie, lass. I know you are much interested."

"We were about to sit here with our sewing," said Miss Carrie. "Wait, Melindy. You must sit on the steps and string beads for me. We shall need them. All the beads clattered off of Nathalie's prettiest gown," she explained to the General, "and it is indeed a disciplinary task to sew the strands on again."

The General smiled politely, absently.

"George," he began, "I understand that Mandeville is a client, something of a friend,— as much as he is to any one. Am I right? Ah! Then I may tell you. I entreat your circumspection, ladies,— and am sure of it.

"H'm'm! When we were youths, Mandeville and I,— that was the time when young Beauregard was dazzling us with his youthful promise,— there was a plantation right here on this spot, Caroline,— good, old leisurely times,— no better than these, though,—

not so good, maybe,— that's the time this story begins.

"Well, Ebers Mandeville and I were like brothers. West Point for me and U. of V. for him and the great differences in our tastes couldn't divide us in the least. He was always the scholar,— but no recluse like now. Indeed, he liked the ladies,— very susceptible,— always softening hither and yon. We have changed rôles there, too!"

The General smiled.

"Nowadays, *I* enjoy, even require, friendships with the fair; but in youth I was no ladies' man. My one *affaire* came late in life and lasted!"

The General rose for a moment and bowed reverently. Nathalie, too, bent her head.

"Mandeville as a lad," the narrator continued, "saw the heroines of poesy in every good-looking lass. But they always undid the bewitchment themselves and lost him on the rebound the moment they showed themselves at all human. That's why his companions thought it all the more remarkable when the quiet, poetic fellow was at last completely and decisively bowled over by a very human young lady who had nothing poetic about her.

"She was handsome, to be sure, in a tall, boyish, angular fashion. She was intensely practical and managed her father's affairs so well that he was almost the only planter in his district who was not cleaned out by the downfall of the Confederacy and *the* Reconstruction. Indeed, his fortune grew —"

"English securities?" asked Marse George.

"Exactly! — She was the most capable of housekeepers and used the gentler accomplishments on sufferance,— only because they were the way of the times. My honored father used to say that she played the pianoforte exactly as if she were all the time considering whether it needed dusting."

A laugh greeted this, and the General gallantly hastened to modify the impression.

"To be sure, she had a crisp, epigrammatic, very enjoyable humor of a type unusual in women, and was a person upon whom less clearly defined natures naturally depended. There was a breeziness about her, a security and freshness not general among Southern ladies of the period. At any rate, her personality had its effect upon the *jeunnesse dorée*. She made more killings than any of the radiant, languishing belles hereabout.

"Ebers adored her. Wrote her poetry by the ream. She kept memoranda on the backs of the sheets and returned the surplus white paper, with the advice that extravagant habits in small things made great losses in time."

"Our poor Mr. Mandeville!" pitied Marse George, laughing.

"The lad saw her essential virtue," continued the General, "her keen honor and love of justice. She was intolerant of any slightest lapse of the manly code. A very great girl in many ways!

"She engaged herself to Ebers, in secret and on

probation. She said she was not sure of herself. He was to understand her perfect freedom to follow a greater call if it came,— and so she would understand his. A strange engagement that had no compensation for poor love-lorn Ebers except a faint hope. In justice let me say, it was he who suggested the arrangement and so insisted upon it that she consented, seeing no good reason to decline."

"That couldn't last, of course," said Nathalie, and blushed as her hearers smiled at her newly acquired authority in matters of the heart.

"It went well enough for a time," said General Haviland, "and might have forever,— but then my friend,— my dear friend —. Forgive me, ladies; news of his death came to-day!" He hastened on, forestalling expressions of sympathy, "One who had been a messmate and friend in the North,— a noble Spaniard from the Indies,—came to New Orleans to visit me.

"His given name was Carlos and will suffice for the story.

"He was the exact opposite of Ebers. Handsome as the night, glorious and flashing as the lightning, brave, tempestuous, temperamental, intense in his emotions, graced with every charm, he gathered all women's hearts with serene unconsciousness.

"He first saw Ebers's *fiancée* at a dance. She was not at her best at a dance. He gave a long glance and said to me simply, 'What a mother of sons!'

"He loved her at once and forever. He did not

know, of course, of her betrothal; but I cannot think it would have changed his feeling if he had. He, too, had been betrothed,— in childhood, by his parents, to a South American cousin whom he had seldom seen. But Carlos had become Americanized and often expressed to me his determination to make his own choice.

"The lady of my story felt Carlos's gaze upon her and turned to meet it. Then I saw a miracle. A plain woman transformed to beauty in an instant of time!

"The bond grew quickly between them.

"Ebers, in his blindness, perceived nothing. He was not on the alert. He had come to feel a false security, due to his lady's continued and even growing favor. He thought so well-defined a character as hers would not have made him even the half-promise unless he were elect.

"Ebers himself became enamored of Carlos. He made him his hero, his prince of romance, worshiped him with that warm idolatry of youth. Alas! He so loved and trusted him that in a moment of weakness he broke his pact of silence and confided to Carlos his betrothal.

"Carlos left New Orleans that night, never to return. He wrote a note to the lady announcing his approaching marriage to the South American cousin."

"How tragic!" cried Miss Carrie, and slipped her hand into her husband's.

"The lady sensed the truth immediately," the story went on, "and sent for Ebers, who, of course, confessed.

"She berated him in bitterest terms. 'Traitor,' she called him, 'ungallant,' 'false,' and sent him away, — to Oxford, to Heidelburg, to his books and their dry comfort.

"He implored forgiveness. 'Oh! Let me make it up to you,' he pled weakly. I have the tale from Ebers.

"'Not to me! Make it up to *him!*' she cried. 'Then I will forgive you,— when you have made it up to *him!*'

"That was poor Ebers's first knowledge that these two great creatures loved each other.

"Mandeville wrote at once to Carlos, explaining, begging his return. It was too late. The impetuous Carlos was wedded when the letter reached him. 'When I can forgive you for telling me your betrothal and not its conditions,' he wrote in his agony, 'I will send for you. Until then, no word!'"

There was a deep sympathetic silence. Then the General resumed, "Word came to me to-day that my splendid Carlos is dead. So I came at once to tell you, George, the possible whereabouts of your client. He probably received a summons at last,— he has waited years of days,— and went to Carlos in the islands."

"Thank you, General Haviland," said Marse George gravely.

"What a sad, sad tale!" said Nathalie.

"Poor Mr. Mandeville!" sighed Miss Carrie.

"Yes'm!" wept the forgotten Melindy from the step, "an' po' Miss Euph'seen, too!"

The General sprang upright. "I did *not* say —" he cried excitedly,—"I did *not* say the lady's name!"

"No, sah! No, sah; you didn'! Oh! 'Scuse me, sah!" said Melindy. "But I thought ev'body must-a *knowed* it was Miss Euph'seen from de very minute she looked at de dust on de pianner and sont back de extra paper from de poems!"

CHAPTER XII

A MESSENGER OF THE GODS

It was raining, a soft drizzle, light but persistent. Melindy was looking out of the window at a fat sparrow who was pecking desperately at the yellow Japan plums,— apparently indifferent to his wet and clinging plumage.

"H'm," she remarked, "dat-ar bird suttinly deserves teh git on in de world, keepin' so busy even in de rain! Jess lak ole Br'er Jimson, over on de plantation. He useteh lay under de tree, rain or shine, jess as patient, day after day, waitin' fo' somebody teh come on down de road an' offer him some work teh do. An' ev'ybody but him done gave up hope and said no work nebber *would* come less'n he got up and look fo' it. But ole Br'er Jimson, he say, 'I'll jess set hyah an' wait,' an' one day ole Col. Ranger *did* come 'long and engaged Br'er Jimson teh chop and saw up some hard wood fo' him. An' ev'ybody say it done serve Br'er Jimson right."

"What did he live on before he got the work at the Colonel's?" asked Nathalie from the rug, where she sat with Eulalia stringing beads.

"On his wife's cooking. You see, Sis Clara Jim-

son, she was a good washerwoman, made good wages. An' when she warn't doin' folkses' laundry, why, den, she useteh cook cohn-pone an' chickum an' cabbage an' pork an' lots ob de eatingest things fo' ole Br'er Jimson, an' he'd come in an' eat 'em.

"He useteh say he didn' care fo' sweets, but every time he step nigh de ole yaller bowl whar Sis Clara Jimson kep' her pies an' cakes, all de li'l Jimson chillums began teh cry an' holler. 'Cause dey knowed it was 'Good-by, cake!' fo' dem.

"But he pretty nigh los' his good times one day. 'Cause a lady from up No'th she tried teh persuade Sis Clara Jimson teh go teh New York wif her. But Sis Clara Jimson didn' go, 'cause she thought she was too age-y teh learn teh speak No'then."

"Learn to speak Northern! Why, childy, they speak the same language in this country, North or South!"

"Do dey, Miss Nat'lie? Well, I'se jess a-tellin' you what Sis Clara Jimson thought. An' Br'er Jimson he jess cried fo' joy, when dat New York lady went away.

"Is Miss 'Gostine done gone away, Miss Nat'lie?"

"Yes. Mme. Du Fossat and Miss Agostine have gone across the Lake, for awhile. They were both feeling languid. We're all going over on Friday to spend the week-end with them,— Miss Eulalia and you and I."

"Oh! Goody!" cried Eulalia. "And when it's not bathing time, may I just *paddle*, Cousin Nat'lie?

'Cause in de country my feet get much dirtier than I am. And I just love to paddle."

"Across the Lake,"— over Lake Pontchartrain and up the winding, beautiful, semi-tropical river, the Tchefuncta,— were lazy little towns on the lake-shore and in the pine-woods.

When the pressure and strain of their financial anxieties had been removed, Mme. Du Fossat and Agostine were very near nervous collapse and went to one of these lotus-eating, dozing little places for a rest.

Agostine attributed her family's happier circumstances to Miss Euphrosyne's help and to some mysterious agency of Nathalie's into which she had promised not to inquire.

Of Gerald's part in their release, her parents had told her nothing.

It seemed to Agostine like the fulfillment of all rapturous dreams, that just when her distress for her father was so providentially lifted, Gerald should become her devoted attendant.

She hesitated, however,— impulsive as she was,— to give herself up to complete hope as to the permanence of her charm for him. Her past sorrow, when his earlier interest had diminished and died, taught her to save herself from too great confidence in that mercurial young gentleman's impetuosity.

Diffidence and pensive guardedness, while they well became Agostine and made her seem even more to be desired, gave Gerald some very salutary qualms.

Was Nathalie mistaken after all? Could it be that Agostine's feeling for him was slighter than that wise young person had supposed?

When Mme. Du Fossat and her daughter went "across the Lake," Gerald asked M. Du Fossat's permission to follow. He would spend his own vacation near them and pursue his courtship.

Agostine's father, grateful and admiring and affectionately inclined toward Gerald, whose sincerity he had such good reason to trust, gave willing consent.

But when Gerald arrived upon the scene, he found himself thwarted in a new direction.

"Nathalie the Wise," he wrote, "please accept Agostine's invitation,— which you must have received by this time,— to spend a week-end here. In the words of the melodrama, 'Hellup! Help!'

"Mme. Du Fossat,— you know how formal she is — will not give me a word with Agostine alone. She chaperones her constantly with a persistence worthy of a more patriotic cause.

"Think — oh! think, fair *confidante*,— of a moonlight sail, with one's lady looking most alluring in the silvery beams, and Mama discoursing in a steady grand-ladyish monotone about the court of the Empress Josephine and how the Du Fossats and Laboissières had scorned it! And only one week more of my vacation!

"Oh, Nathalie, *do* something,— for I can't think she cares as much as you think she does.

"And, say! Bring Melindy,— I'm superstitious about that little *mascotte.*"

Therefore Nathalie, stringing beads on the rug, promised the children their outing.

"Hope it won't rain," said Melindy. "Jess *look* at dat sparrer! He sho'ly will explode ef he eats any mo' ob dem plums. Shoo! Go on, you greedy bird, doan' you see it's a-rainin'? Dey's on'y one thing I's afeard ob, an' dat's not two, Miss Nat'lie. An' dat's dat dat rain'll come and drizzle and leak an' spoil de party. 'Cause I ain' as calm 'bout de rain as dat-ar sparrer is."

Nathalie shared her fear. It had been a rainy week and she foresaw dripping woods and soggy shore. But she felt that, whatever the weather, she must obey the summons, for she smilingly recalled another letter received in the same mail with Gerald's.

"My dear Nathalie," it ran, "please, if it be possible, accept Agostine's invitation and mine to join us here for the week-end, with Eulalia to companion you on the trip, and Melindy, if you wish her, to run errands and help amuse Eulalia.

"For, my dear child, I am not wholly unselfish in begging you to do this. You know that I am sadly in need of quiet and rest and came to this place for that reason. But young Gerald Haviland,— whom I like exceedingly,— is here and with us constantly.

"Of course, it keeps me in unending chaperonage.

"Imagine, *ma chère*, a superb, balmy night, gently lapping waves, a restful sail,— Heaven, to tired nerves! — marred by the necessity of steady conversation about dear knows what. A new courthouse, I believe he talked about!

"I might retire for awhile if there were two of you girls instead of one.

"Please come, child, and act as substitute for a little time.

"Your tired friend,

"MYRTHÉ DE LABOISSIÈRE DU FOSSAT."

The day of the voyage was not rainy, but radiant beyond their hopes. A bejeweled day! The lake lay like a sapphire strewn with diamonds, under a pearl and turquoise sky, and the setting of bright sunshine was appropriately golden.

The crowded, slow little steamer drifted its leisurely way across the blue surface, turned into the beautiful, forest-bordered, winding, jasmine-fragrant river and stopped at a landing near its mouth, where lake-side beach poked its sandy nose into the pine woods.

The eager children rushed to the side of the boat. Nathalie, looking as sweet and cool in her suit of dull blue linen as the blue water-hyacinths at her waist, waved cheerily to Agostine.

All the guests of the little hotel hidden among the trees came down to the wharf to see the boat come in, — the event of the day.

"Oh! Deary me!" said Eulalia. "There's Rosy Flemming, Melindy!"

"Oh! Lawsy me!" said Melindy. "Ef dar ain't Edwin Halley Osbo'n LaRouche!"

Nathalie said nothing but, with equal dismay, she saw, back of Mme. Du Fossat, the unctuous, smiling features of Captain Jemmy Claiborne, an unwelcome and not-to-be-discouraged admirer of her own.

Agostine rushed forward to kiss her; Mme. Du Fossat bent over her little favorite, Eulalia, and, "Ah! Adjuster of destinies! Glad to see you!" said Gerald to Melindy.

"Thanky, Marse Gerry. I doan' jess rightly know what dat name means dat you done called me. Sounds sort o' lak a railroad train a-comin'. But I'se glad teh see you too, sah."

"Why, Agostine, you're getting positively *round*," admired Nathalie, happy in the improved color and brightness of her friend's appearance.

"There's to be a dance to-night. Do let me stake a claim to the first waltz?" requested Captain Jemmy, taking Nathalie's valise from Gerald.

Nathalie looked up inquiringly at Mme. Du Fossat with whom she was walking.

"Yes," said that lady, "there's an informal dance every Friday night. I shall have to appear, of course," she added *sotto voce*, "but I live in the hope of rest to-morrow, if you will relieve me then, my dear."

"Nathalie," said Gerald, as soon as he caught her

private attention, "I've got to go home to-morrow night. We've — our firm's been awarded a new library in Birmingham and I have to appear before the committee on Monday. I can't have Agostine alone at the dance, of course. But what can we do to-morrow? Mme. Du Fossat will probably be willing to retire in your favor,— but where can *we* retire?

"This hotel looks small,— but, I tell you, both forest and shore are literally swarming with perfect thousands of people.

"Don't laugh, Nathalie. You'd see their multitude if you were trying to escape them.

"You see, I'm specially anxious to — speak to Agostine now, because that charming naval cousin, whose lifelong devotion is so very picturesque, arrives the very day I leave. He'll bring a cargo of new languishing songs and ropes of brass buttons. Oh, well!"

"Why not go sailing, Gerry? Get a boat and we three can be off for the day. Agostine can bring luncheon and I'll bring a book,— an absorbing book."

"Nathalie, you are dear to my soul! The country is saved!"

"Only, Gerald,— a boon! Pray do not mention our project to any one; and I'll ask Agostine and Mme. Du Fossat not to do so."

"Am I likely to issue any invitations to this sailing party, do you think?"

"No. But — I don't want to say anything

'catty,'— but if Captain Jemmy knows we are going it won't be necessary to invite him. He'll come."

"Righto! Poor Jemmy! Eheu! We can but hope."

"Well, Melindy says, 'Hope's a good saddle, but you got teh have a horse.' We must lay our plans carefully and get an early start."

Even the early start,— and the three were ready, eager and merry while the daylight over the lake still had an infantile softness and pinkness — even the early start was of no avail. For, beside their little catboat stood Captain Jemmy Claiborne, resplendent in striped flannels.

"Well, this is jolly!" he exclaimed. "Let me in on it, Haviland!"

Melindy and Eulalia, who stood at a window of the hotel, watching the little boat put off in the morning mist, little knew the strangely mixed emotions that it carried.

"Come 'long, Missy 'Lalia. We ain't a-gwine-a be hyah more'n jess till Monday, an' dey's heaps ob things teh do hyah dat cayn't be did at we-all's house. Le's git our breakfas', an' go out an' make p'etend we is oysters on de shore. All you has teh do is jess open an' shet yo' mouf and wait fo' somebody teh come eat you. First off, I'll eat you, an' den you kin eat me. Come 'long befo' dat Edwin gits teh me or dat Rosy gits teh you! Dey's both much too mouthy fo' oysters."

"Too *mouthy?* What d'ye mean, *mouthy?*"

"I mean dey talks too much. An' dey quarrels too much. Come 'long, Missy, honey!

"Oh! Bless ma heaht! Missy Euly, ef dar ain't dat boy now, walkin' up an' down outside a-waitin' fo' us jess lak a li'l dog. Well, folkses dat you cayn't be rid ob, you might jess es well be polite teh."

Edwin waited patiently for them under the big palmetto on the hotel lawn.

"You suttinly is a slow-poke, you, Melindy," said he. "I done got so thin standin' hyah waitin' fo' you, I mos' wore away teh nothin! I ain' seen you teh talk teh in a month ob Saturdays."

"Well, is you got anythin' pertickler teh say teh me?" asked Melindy sweetly.

"On'y to ax, 'Will you be ma gal?' teased Edwin. "I'se a great fighter, I is. I done fit a lot sence I seen you. I done whipped ev'ybody. I whipped two boys from Baton Rouge, I whipped de plumber's boy, I whipped two boys from nex' door teh ma aunt's house. I done gib one ob 'em a good whipping an' flung him up higher dan a kite," he boasted.

"'Pears teh me you is mighty foolish teh be givin' away what you need so much yo'se'f," said Melindy with a smile.

"Melindy!" cried Eulalia plaintively, "here comes Rosy out of the hotel."

"Well, Missy Euly, yo' Papa says, 'All things comes teh dem dat waits'; so let's us be movin' on. Good-by, Edwin."

"O! ho! I ain't gone yet," said Edwin, following close. "Good mohnin', li'l Missy Rosy," he called.

"Good morning, Eulalia. Morning!"— this second greeting was more cavalierly given to the others. For Rosa Flemming's Northern mother did not understand the secret of that familiar, affectionate intercourse with the negro in the household that no negro who does understand it ever presumes upon.

"Good morning to you, Missy Rosy," said Melindy courteously, thinking in her heart, however, "Huh! You ain' quality. Quality folks ain' 'fraid teh be frien'ly. Ma white folks is quality. An' de teacher says ma black folks might a' been kings in Africa befo' yours was even bleached."

"Let's play giving a reception," said Rosa. "I'll be hostess and you must all come in."

The game was not in the least attractive to the others, for Rosa understood social forms and matters of precedence, to which they had not yet been subject, and she was a very martinet, proud of using her superior knowledge.

Besides, Melindy and Eulalia yearned to suit their games to these delightful new surroundings. But Eulalia was too polite to urge her own ideas upon Rosa, and Melindy had been trained by Sis Suky to accept her little mistress's decision.

But there were ways of swinging the tide of things not dreamt of in Rosa's philosophy. Melindy waited. At any rate, the imaginary reception had one com-

pensation. Edwin wearied of it and departed to a little distance.

"Dat wuz a awful nice reception, Missy Rosy," Melindy said, after a little. "You suttinly does know a heap 'bout parties. Now, Missy Euly, wouldn't it be nice ef Missy Rosy would make b'lieve give a *dinner* party, an' you an' me, we could be de oysters?"

"Oh! yes," agreed Eulalia, "and first we could be on the beach. Then we'd be fishermen and catch each other. And Rosy could be getting her table ready under that pine tree."

"But who'd be the guests?" objected Rosa.

"Oh! Jess make-b'lieve folkses. Dey is de bes' at a make-b'lieve dinner party, 'cause dey has got make-b'lieve appetites. An' hyah's dat Edwin again! He kin be somebody dat's *so* sorry, but dey really couldn't come."

Melindy and Eulalia sat down, at once, on the shore, opening and shutting their mouths whenever laughter permitted. This performance was so evidently enjoyable that soon Rosa forgot her formal parties and her quarrelsomeness and Edwin forgot to tease and all four children became fish and gulls and kingfishers and scarlet tanagers and all the creatures native to the place,— which had been the clever Melindy's plan from the beginning.

Gerald's sailing party was less successful. Only Captain Jemmy enjoyed it, and he added to the tragedy of the occasion for the others by saying often

and jovially, "Well, well, well! Isn't this delightful? And to think that you were going to leave me out of this! But I watch my interests better than that, Miss Nathalie."

Then he sang to them, lusty, loud, roystering ballads that permitted no conversation,— at least in any register lower than a scream.

At the end of a stanza there sounded a great splash.

"Oh!" cried Agostine.

"What was it?" asked Nathalie.

"Drop something?" inquired Captain Jemmy Claiborne facetiously.

"Yes," answered Gerry, "the lunch fell overboard."

"Gerry!" said Nathalie.

He looked straight into her truth-compelling eyes. His own eyes twinkled.

"Nathalie!" he mimicked. "Just as I tell you. I dropped the luncheon overboard. We'll have to put in, in time for twelve o'clock."

Even Captain Jemmy was too hungry to protest.

At the luncheon table Nathalie asked Mme. Du Fossat's consent to their going for a stroll among the pines, and felt guilty at the grateful glance with which that weary guardian gave it.

"Never mind our mail," said Nathalie gayly. "Everybody goes to the office for mail after luncheon. We'll just get into the forest while it is still and uninhabited — ahead of the crowd, in that lovely

noon-day hush. Let's slip out through this little rear door and dash for the woods."

They ran playfully into the forest fastnesses.

There Nathalie sat with her book under a tree.

"You two strip me some young palmetto to make baskets for the children," she requested, in roguish triumph.

"At last!" whispered Gerald to Agostine.

"Ah! Here you are!" cried Captain Jemmy Claiborne, panting and perspiring with the chase. "Stripping palmetto? I'll show you how we do that in Florida. What's the matter, Haviland? What did you say?"

"I didn't say it. I swear I didn't. You must have read my thoughts."

"If you really want to be a good angel, Captain Claiborne," said Nathalie, "won't you go to the office and ask for our mail? It's mail-time now. And we are so lazy and comfortable here."

"I'll do anything for you, of course. But, I say, Haviland, I've been tearing up from the house after you and I'm melted. *You* go be the good angel and get the letters and I'll stay here with the ladies and be a selfish brute and cool off."

So Gerald went for the mail. His sentiments were not angelic.

Agostine, who had no sense of humor, stripped palmetto in pained silence.

Nathalie laughed. She could not help it. Agostine looked at her with astonished reproach.

When Gerald returned he brought the mail, and Melindy.

"Now!" said he, "here she is!"

"What did you want me fo', Miss Nat'lie?" asked the child.

"Why, Gerald!" exclaimed Nathalie, accusingly, and of Melindy she demanded, "Where did you leave Eulalia?"

"She's playin' wif Missy Rosy, jess es frien'ly an' happy as two li'l kittens. 'Twas me made dem hab so much fun."

"Of course," interjected Gerald.

"Did you want me fo' somethin', Miss Nat'lie?"

Nathalie looked at Gerald provokingly. "No, dear," she replied to Melindy.

"Why, Marse Gerry said —"

"Yes, she does, Melindy," Gerald assured her. "Indeed she does want you. Maybe she doesn't know she wants you. But she wants you very much."

"Haviland is so absurd sometimes," whispered Captain Jemmy to Nathalie. "I wish he would stay away a little. I want to talk to you."

"Here comes Missy Euly an' Missy Rosy Flemming now an' dat-ar no-'count Edwin boy teh tease us. He was rale nice fo' a li'l while, but den he began teh be a alligator an' chase us all over de place.

"But I'se a-gwine teh git rid ob *him*."

"Let me see you do it," said Gerald.

"*Did* you want me fo' somethin', Miss Nat'lie, honey?" persisted Melindy.

"No, dear. But you youngsters may as well play here in the woods for awhile. It's very hot and sunny in the open now."

"It sho'ly is hot. Too hot fo' Missy Euly an' Missy Rosy an' me. But *Edwin!*" raising her voice as he approached. "Why, he's so strong he chased us all over de place and warn't hot or tired at all. I bet *he* wouldn't hab teh set hyah in de woods wif li'l gals, when de boys is a-runnin' races on de beach. Oh! Good-by, Edwin. See you atter while.— H'm! I had teh git rid ob him, 'cause he pretty nigh had Missy Euly ready teh cry."

"Oh! ho!" said Gerald, "I see!" And after a few moments of forced and forceless conversation, "Claiborne, I'll wager you've got your banjo in your room. These woods would be just the place for that machine, if you can make it talk the way you used to. Run get it like a good fellow!"

Captain Jemmy smiled with gratified vanity. The desire for his music was not often expressed. He rose with alacrity.

As he vanished through the trees, Gerald said, "Didn't I say you needed Melindy? I've imitated her highly successful method."

He crossed the patch of green toward Agostine. Nathalie picked up her book.

"You children — big and little,— do look most cool and comfortable," called Mme. Du Fossat, coming through the trees with her bag of embroidery. "I am going to the summerhouse to sew. But I will

stay with you just for a little while, that you may know that I have not altogether deserted."

And she did, until the figure of Captain Jemmy returning with his banjo, scared her away,— as well it might.

When the Captain had twanged beatifically and unceasingly for an hour, "Pray pardon my going," said Agostine, "but truly I have a headache to-day. It is the heat. I must lie down a little. Also it is nearly time to dress for dinner."

Nathalie and the children accompanied her, leaving Gerald sitting gloomily in the forest hearing out the music he had asked for.

"Life is so merry," sang the Captain, "Life is so gay!"

Melindy looked back at them.

"Miss Nat'lie," said she, "I knowed a li'l boy an' he went visitin' an' his Mammy done tole him dat ef anybody offered him anythin' teh eat or teh drink he should take it an' say 'Yas, ma'am, ef you please, ma'am,' very pretty. An' de chilluns dat he war a-visitin' dey was takin' some bad-tastin' medicine — 'twas suphur an' m'lasses — an' deir Ma axed him would he take some, an' he say, 'Yas, ma'am; ef you please, ma'am!' An' when he took it he look jess lak Marse Gerry a-lissenin' teh dat music. What make dat music so sort ob slam-bangy, Miss Nat'lie?"

"Poor old Gerald!" thought Nathalie. "The Fates fight against him. And he has to go home

right after dinner. I suppose that Art Committee in Birmingham simply couldn't wait!"

Poor Gerald, indeed! Agostine felt quite certain that if he could leave without the least word of particular allegiance to her, after nearly two weeks in this most romantic place, Agostine was quite sure that superficial gallantry was merely characteristic of Gerald and that she wronged herself to consider him so tenderly. Her *amour propre* was wounded. She would not even speak of him to Nathalie.

Therefore,— for Agostine was very young,— she welcomed the opportunity to show intense elation when Mme. Du Fossat announced at dinner that she had had a letter from her nephew, Lieutenant de Bonneville, reaffirming his promise to visit them on the morrow.

Gerald almost groaned aloud. And Nathalie was all the more alert to say to him, softly, the moment the evening meal was over, "Go now, quickly. You have fifteen minutes at least before you need start for the boat. There is no one on the small porch but Melindy. Hurry. Take Agostine there."

"Agostine!" she called, to help him, "come here, on the gallery a moment."

Then, when both had obeyed, she put the length of the porch between herself and them.

Gerald spoke quickly, ignoring Melindy.

"Agostine," he said, "there hasn't been opportunity — there isn't time to say this thing the way I ought — but I couldn't say what I wish to say any-

way — there are no words."— It was a sign of deep feeling when loquacious Gerald had to make that confession.—" Only I could not go away without telling you, without asking you —"

" Couldn't let you go without saying 'Good-by,' Haviland. I'll go down to the boat with you. We're all going. We're so sorry you must be off!" said genial Captain Jemmy, stepping through the French window.

His voice went booming on as the sweet evening deepened, until, " Come, children!" called Agostine's mother. " I'm grieved that it has become necessary for you to go back to the city to-night, Mr. Haviland. But if you must take this boat, we shall need to hurry."

A merry party from the hotel escorted the far from merry Gerald to the wharf and sang out farewells and hopes for his return, as he mounted the gang-plank of the little steamer.

Melindy darted forward and mounted after him.

" Oh! Marse Gerry," said she, breathlessly, " ain't you forgot somethin'? I done heard you say you couldn't go without axin' Miss 'Gostine somethin' an' you ain' nebber axed her nothin'. Cayn't I ax her fo' you? Ain' I kine and thoughtful, Marse Gerry?"

" All ashore for the shore! All aboard for the boat!" cried a sailor.

" Melindy," said Gerald in desperation, " yes. Go to her immediately. Let no one else hear you. Ask

her if she'll marry me. Tell her if she will to wave her scarf."

Melindy went gleefully, expanding with importance.

As the gang-plank was lifted, Gerald watched, with frightened heart, Melindy standing on tiptoe to reach Agostine's ear.

As the ropes were untied to release the boat from shore, he saw Agostine clasp her hands upon her breast with her characteristic intense little gesture.

Was she indignant, outraged?

As the little steamer creaked away from the shore, he saw Agostine wave her scarf!

Before the breach of water grew too wide, Gerald Haviland, leaving his satchel behind him on the boat, leapt to the land.

"I've decided to stay," he announced to the astounded gathering. "What's a library? Come here, Melindy!"

CHAPTER XIII

IN QUIETNESS

REMEMBERING General Haviland's love for delicate flowers, Nathalie brought a basketful of young swamp-jasmine vines from the woods along the Tchefuncta. Early in the morning of the day after their return from the eventful visit to Agostine, she dispatched Melindy and Eulalia to bear the gift to him.

"Tell General Haviland to be sure to plant them at the very edge of his water-lily pond, and to get them in the ground right away — before the sun is hot," she directed.

"Yas'm, Miss Nath'lie; us'll tell him," Melindy assured her. "Dey'll sho'ly grow up fine an' pretty den, won't dey, Miss Nat'lie?"

"Well,— I *hope* so, dear!"

"H'm. When dey grows so big and spready-out in de swamp woods whar nobody tends teh dem, it do seem lak dey *ought* teh jess abound in flowers fo' Gin'al Hav'land. He'll nurse 'em along so good. Ef dey has any *thank-you* in dem, dey'll grow up for him."

Melindy looked sternly at the vines in the basket.

"But, howsomever," she relented, dimpling, "when

folkses forgits teh be thankful an' act pretty, what kin you expec' ob flowers?

"Dat fat ole Marse Du Ponta from 'round de corner was out walkin' wif young Miss Sally Gray yistiddy ebenin',— jess after we come home. An' she done drop her pocket-handkerchy, an' he try teh pick it up fo' her an' he's so fat he couldn'. An' he pushed me 'way when I went teh git it. So I say to him,— real pretty an' perlite —'Please, sah, Marse Du Ponta, ef you jess blow out yo' bref an' hold yo'se'f widout breavin', fo' jess a minute an' bend over real quick, I think p'raps you kin do it more better.' An' he ain't nebber said nothin' lak 'Thank you, Melindy!'

"Oh, well! Ev'ybody must do de way dey is dispositioned teh do. Some runs teh grins an' some runs teh grumbles.

"Come 'long, Missy Euly, honey, Melindy'll git you yo' pink an' white sunbonnet teh pertec yo' pritty cheekses. I doesn't tan nor freckle, myse'f, so I doesn't need no hat!"

Young as was the morning, the children found General Haviland already busy in his gentle-colored garden.

"Good morning, little Eulalia! And good morning, Imp, to you! Coming to see me? What are you looking at so hard, Melindy?"

"'Scuse me, sah!" coming at once to attention, "but I jess seen de mis-fittest thing I ebber did see in all ma days. It do beat all! Looky dere, now!"

"Why, I see nothing but a wagon-load of coal going by."

"An' a pure white horse a-draggin' de load! Teh be a white horse an' work in a coal yard! What *is* de use ob dat!

"Hyah's some jasmine vines, Gin'al Hav'land,—"

"From Cousin Nathalie,— from across the Lake. She got them in the swampy woods —"

"An' please teh put dem right nigh de edge of de water-lily pond —"

"And get them in the ground before the sun is hot. They bear lovely yellow flowers that smell all goody —"

"An' ev'ybody at our house sends you-all deir lub. My sakes, Missy Euly! You an' me is talkin' in an' out lak dancin' 'round de Maypole."

General Haviland's expressions of pleasure at the gift and his promises to obey all directions were shortened by the sudden disappearance of half of his audience.

Eulalia saw Dr. Robert Haviland approaching from the house and darted forward to meet him.

Quietness and confidence were certainly the young Doctor's strength in their magnetizing effect upon children.

He never condescended to the beguilements, trivial flatteries and vapid questionings with which most adults seek to allure the young. But the very simplicity and frankness of his approach seemed to draw

them at once into a relationship of sympathy and understanding.

"Run along, then, deserter!" cried the General to Eulalia. And to her companion he asked, "Why do you young folks always run to Master Robert, Melindy?"

Melindy thought for a minute or two.

"'Cause us jess *lubs* Marse Rob, I reckon."

"Yes. But you love me too, don't you? And Master Gerald?"

"Yes, sah. Us sho'ly do, sah!" smiling winsomely.

"Well, why do you all *run* to the Doctor — all of you?"

"I has teh think 'bout dat," and, after a pause for meditation, "I reckon it's 'cause dey's two sorts ob lub," she said thoughtfully. "Dey's de lub dat you kin put down an' take up an' dey's lub dat you *lives* in. An' dat's de kine dat jess nachelly comes out an' pulls you.

"Dey's somefin' so sorter *steady* 'bout Marse Rob. He doan' nebber seem teh *flicker*. You jess wants teh go teh Marse Rob, 'cause he's always right dar when you gits teh him."

"Good for you, Imp!" and General Haviland looked proudly at the young Doctor's steady, firm arms and steady, firm, white, sensitive hands as he held the squirming and ecstatic Eulalia steadily and firmly aloft.

There was something primal, restful, enduring even in the straight way he stood, with his heels together well under his lithe young body.

The sentimental General's eyes grew moist. Following a line of thought that had frequently disturbed him of late, "'Jess natchelly pulls you to him,'" he said to himself. "Maybe that's how it is with our lass. Love that you live in! Ah, I know! — And I have been making Nathalie wait for happiness and considering only Gerald. Women are so to-be-sought-for, I fear I never thought enough about the possibility of Nathalie's being 'jess natchelly pulled' to Robert."

"Robert!" he called aloud. "Doctor Boy!"— very tenderly —"can you stay a few minutes to talk to me, before you are off to the hospital?"

Robert lowered Eulalia. "Certainly, sir. How-d'ye, Melindy! With a basket of swamp jasmine! Have you been up Tchefuncta?"

"Yassir. Miss Nat'lie took Missy Euly an' me teh see Miss 'Gostine. Marse Gerry were dar too."

The General lowered his eyes. Robert, perfectly understanding his perplexity, put his hand upon his uncle's shoulder.

"It is about — *that* — that I wish to speak to you, Rob," said General Haviland.

And when the children had departed with their basket freshly laden with palest pink crepe myrtle, the General continued, "I see some things rather differently, my boy. You and the lass have waited long

enough to favor an old man's whim. Gerry has always been my baby — *our* baby, eh? — and I did feel very shy of hurting him. But youth is short. And if Gerald must suffer there is no help. I have been short-sighted, perhaps, and selfish, to you and to Nathalie. I fear you may be the loser for it, Robert. Perhaps she thinks it strange and laggardly of you that you should await my pleasure."

"Dear Uncle," Robert interrupted, "let us not be too sure that Nathalie is to be had for the seeking. Yes,— I do know that she favors me; I am so proud to know it! But to presume that it means — all! Why should she, Uncle General?"

The General smiled. He knew that Robert's modesty was very real. In General Haviland's mind, the self-assured, self-confident young Doctor stood, in spite of these qualities, as the most truly modest young man of his acquaintance. "For," the General assured his cronies, "he has neither the talkativeness about his affairs that is a form of egotism — often of boastfulness — nor the reticence that argues a sense of superiority. There is a fine line between — and my Robert stands squarely upon it."

"And even if I should be so blessed, sir," Robert continued, "be sure that Nathalie would be glad to have me guided by you as to the proper time for speech. She loves you,— and Gerald. She would not have it otherwise. She would understand. We know our lass, sir!"

"True. But — her mother delayed her marriage,

considering my feelings. That I should let this Nathalie do so, too!" The General sighed. "And as for your not being worthy,— Robert, do you remember our old drill, when you came home each week from school?"

"At attention, sir!"

"Honest?"

"Yes, sir."

"Truthful?"

"Yes, sir."

"Unafraid?"

"Yes, sir."

"Duties done?"

"I hope so, sir. Or doing."

"Fond of work?"

"I eat it up — no credit to me."

"Helpful? Indeed, I need not ask."

"I try to be."

"Loyal, of course you are, and kind and not self-indulgent. Studious?"

"Have to be."

"Clean, Robert?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"Boy, our Nathalie can expect, or even desire, no more. Respect yourself, Rob, and win her. Bless you,— son!"

"Father!" whispered the Doctor, and clasped the old man's hand.

Robert had mounted the porch and the General

had turned to his gardening, when a "Whoop!" arrested their attention.

Gerald came bounding up the walk, shouting, "Uncle! Bud! I've news! I've news!"

Robert cried joyfully, "The library has been awarded to you! Good! We knew it would be! Bravo! But try not to explode, Gerry; it'll mess up the walk."

"Library nothing! Behold me, Elder Brother, and hide your diminished head. Even you, Uncle! I am the dignified, responsible man of this family. I am engaged to be married!"

The General cast a dismayed, bewildered glance at Robert, who clasped the porch-railing, went white, but smiled bravely.

Both Robert and his uncle, being themselves of the one-woman-forever type of man, thought at once of Nathalie.

"Thanks for these kind words," said Gerald, piqued at the momentary silence. "Are you two entirely overcome?"

Robert and the General came to him hastily with congratulations and assurances of affection.

"But you did rather knock us breathless," said his uncle.

"Why,— you see, I didn't tell you that I was 'rushing' Agostine —"

"Agostine!"

"Of *course*, Agostine. Who else? I didn't tell

you I was 'rushing' her, because you've so often heard of my other 'crushes' and might have thought this a light and passing thing, like those. And I didn't want that, for Agostine's sake. For this is the real article, Uncle General, and I'm the happiest man on this round ball called *terra*."

As the Doctor passed through the garden-gate a little later, he turned back for a moment and called to Gerald, still happily regaling his uncle with his love-story.

"Gerry," asked the Doctor, "Nathalie was up Tchefuncta, too,— does she know?"

"Surely; Nathalie the Wise was guide, philosopher and friend. I'm going to see her now. Don't care if I don't get any work done to-day. This thing has got to be talked about."

When Gerald made this promise good and joined Nathalie on the porch of the Big White House, her first question to him was, "Does Robert know?"

"Hullo! That's what *he* asked me, 'Does Nathalie know?' Why —" he lifted astonished eyes to her tell-tale face, "Nathalie! Have you been having the bad taste all this time to prefer Robert Haviland to *me*? Well, you deserve your title, Nathalie the Wise.

"Forgive me, Nathalie. I know I shouldn't have spoken. But I want all the world to be joyously romantic like me. And he *is* the best man alive, old girl."

"You're forgiven, Gerry," Nathalie laughed easily,

though still in blushes. "I don't hear all that is said to me. I take Melindy's advice. She says, 'Lots ob things tinkle dat ain't got no clappers teh ring. Look out you doan' take dem fo' bells.' That's an insult to you, Sir Light Tongue, and we're quits. My love to Agostine!" she called gayly, as he beat a retreat.

But when Gerald had gone, Nathalie sat long on the steps in the sunshine, with her chin in her hands and her glad eyes looking over the roses into a vision rosier than they.

Robert knew! Now he would come. All the beautiful currents of her life seemed about to converge into a golden ocean.

The maidenly dreams of the past seemed far-off and unreal. Almost in bewilderment Nathalie stood alone on the threshold of a mighty reality.

Into her glad heart there came a little tremor that was almost a dread. She had longed to have Robert speak of love to her, had even timidly dared to imagine the moment — but now she remembered what other men had said to her in their love-making, Gerald's youthful impetuosities, the platitudes of one man who had cared, the romanticisms of one, the downright prose of another. Nothing would do, no words like theirs would do, no words that even Robert could say,— she feared no words at all could do aught but injure this radiant holy secret that had grown so silently, so gradually into her heart for years, living on all that was deepest and best in her,

unknown even to herself, until one day, it burst into bloom and she found her life enveloped in its perfume.

She shrank from what she had longed for,— to have Robert ask, in much-used language for what was already so eternally his. And yet she longed, too, for that from which she shrank.

It was coming! Robert would come that evening, she was sure. Nathalie looked back upon all the tendernesses and beauties of her singularly glad young life and hoped with all her heart that this might be its crown, that nothing would spoil its poetry and perfection.

"It will be right, however it comes, of course," she sighed, "but,— oh! — let it come just right!"

In Robert, too, the same hope had its voice. All day the thought was with him, "How to tell her!"

His life brought him so close to the heart of life, every phrase, every expression of emotion he had heard. The vital feelings of the soul, the ultimate passions of humanity,— he had heard them told. Always the word had failed of the fact! And to his experience the intensest of words had grown commonplace.

Oh! For some new language in which to ask this wondrous thing, to tell this splendid thing to Nathalie, — some new wordless language of the mind!

When Robert came at evening, Nathalie sat alone on the porch-rail in her favorite corner among the sweet yellow roses. She looked like a bouquet of white roses, herself, in the dusk, in her filmy white

dress; a cluster of roses lay in her lap and a spray upon her hair.

The Southern moon, just rising, silvered the fragrant air.

Robert stood in silence looking down upon her. She lifted her frank eyes to his.

In the distance, little Melindy was singing; her exquisite, plaintive treble floated over the rose-laden evening:

You nebber kin hyeah de sunlight gleamin',
But it comes, ma honey, but it comes;
You nebber kin hyeah de moonbeams beamin',
But dey comes, ma honey, but dey comes!
You nebber kin hyeah de roses breavin',
You nebber kin hyeah de perfumes leavin',
You nebber kin hyeah ma lovin' an' ma grievin',—
But dey comes, ma honey, but dey comes!

You knows dey's de sun, 'cause he brightens up de place,
When he comes, ma honey, when he comes;
You knows dey's de moon, 'cause she shows her pritty face,
When she comes, ma honey, when she comes.
An' de roses, so sweet, nebber needs teh say a word,
Deir fragrance makes you know dey's dar, es plain es if you heard!
An' if you'll let me live fo' you, you'll know how deep I'se stirred,—
Lemme come,—oh! ma honey!—lemme come!

"To live for you, Nathalie!" said Robert.

"Come!" she answered him.

And, far over the garden, Melindy called in triumph, "Oh! Doesn't I sing dat song mighty sweet an' pritty?"

CHAPTER XIV

THROWING THE LIFE LINE

"THIS will be a busy morning for you, child," said Miss Carrie one bright Saturday as Melindy, obeying the summons of her bell, appeared before her and Nathalie in the sewing room. "Lots of errands,—and all important!"

"Da's good, Miss Carrie," dimpling with the happiness of service. "I jess lubs teh run erran's and an' see all ober de city an' say, 'Goo' mo'nin'! Mo'nin'!' teh everybody an' dey says, 'Dar's a mannerly li'l gal, fo' a fac'.' Whar is I a-gwine, Miss Carrie, honey?"

"First to Mr. Mandeville to take him some of Miss Nathalie's wonderful cactus flowers. He has just come home and he is not well and needs heartening. Then, to carry this letter to General Haviland for your Marse George. And then to go to the convent school where the sisters will give you some lingerie they have embroidered for Miss Nathalie's trousseau."

"What d'ye mean,—'trousseau'?" asked Eulalia, who had followed Melindy. "What's 'trousseau,' Mother?"

"Please'm, kin I tell her, Miss Carrie? I'll tell *you, Missy* Euly. I knows dat too. I suttinly does

know a heap, doesn' I, Miss Carrie? When ladies is goin' teh git married, dey alluz acts es ef dey was gwine teh move far away from de dressmakers an' de stores an' so dey gits jess es many clothes es dey kin, teh las' 'em over. Dat's *trousseau*, all dem clothes is. Nobody but white folks has dem, 'cause niggers nebber wouldn' hab no chance teh git married at all ef dey had teh wait fo' all dat dudin' up. Sometimes dey has good luck, howsomebber. When Sis Suky's frien', Sis Danva Callaranda —"

"Sis *what*, Melindy?" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Sis Danva Callaranda. Doan' you 'member, Miss Nat'lie, whar Marse Gerry Hav'lan' went last summer?"

"Oh! Caroline, she means Denver, Colorado!"

"Yas'm. Das whar I said,— Danva Callaranda. Dis-ar gal's daddy worked on a Pull-man cyar,— Pull-*man!* Doesn' dem cyars pull de ladies an' chilluns, Miss Nat'lie? — an' went teh Danva Callaranda, an' he lak dat place so much dat he name dis-ar little scrap ob skinny daughter dat-ar big fat name. Well'm, Sis Danva Callaranda was a-gwine-a git married an' her missus gin her a real smack-up, silk dress ob hern, 'cause de red trimmin's done got wet an' spoiled out a li'l bit. Suttinly was a pritty dress, Miss Nathalie! It was kind o' dirty gray an' it had red ribbon bows on it big es auction-flags an' lots ob red spiders an' worms an' other critters wrigglin' all over it. An' Sis Danva Callaranda, she got her a long veil made out-er 'skeeter nettin' off de bed, an

a wreaf ob yaller roses; an' she look so elegant dat, when she went in de street cyar goin' teh de church teh git married, 'mos' all de white folks in de cyar done got out an' went wif her. Dey ain' nebber seen a niggah gal look so scrumptious.

"Shall I pick de cactuses fo' Marse Mandeville, ma own se'f? Shall I, Miss Nat'lie, honey?"

"Yes, you may gather them," reading the child's desire, "and Remus may go with you, if you wish, to help carry the packages home."

"Ramus, too, Missy? 'Cause dey's philopenas, Remus an' Ramus is; dey never comes separate. Ef I should see one ob dem Twinses widout de yuther, I 'clar' teh goodness, I'd think I was blin' in one eye, or at leas' eyesighted. Goo'-by, Miss Carrie! Bye, Miss Nat'lie! Bye, li'l Missy Euly! Melindy'll bring you somepin' good. Marse George done gin me a nickel."

Remus and Ramus welcomed the invitation to accompany Melindy on her errands, and followed humbly in her train as she walked ahead, grandly bearing the huge red bunch of plushy cactus blooms.

A voice in the distance calling "Fraish figs! Fraish figs!" gave her pause.

"Shucks!" she exclaimed, "Hyah comes dat Edwin Halley Osbo'ne La Rouche agin'. He mus' be goin' de rounds wif he Daddy. Doan' you answer him, Twinses, no matter whar he say. He's a awful sassy boy!"

But Edwin, as he hove in sight and had his glance

arrested by the flaming bunch of flowers, said nothing at all to the children. Only, he went through exaggerated antics of astonishment and admiration and, as Melindy came by bearing her bright bouquet and followed by the Twinses in single file, Edwin sprang to the head of the line beating an imaginary drum and whistling a march shrill and loud.

"Shell I punch his haid?" whispered the Amazon Remus.

"Le's go home, Melindy. We ain' got far yit; le's go home an' wait awhile," suggested her more timid brother.

"Huh!" derided Edwin overhearing, "You sho' is brave, boy! You better quit follerin' ma gal!" and left the three silenced and enraged.

Suddenly Melindy dimpled.

"Reckon we does look lak a parade," she admitted, "wif me so cocky and proud up in front an' you-all snailin' behine. I was kind-er satisfied wif our looks befo' dis-ar Edwin come. I reckon, lots o' times, folks dat thinks dey looks lak somepin' sholy *do* look lak somepin', but not lak de somepin' dat dey thinks dey looks lak. Bress you, no! He's awful smaht, dat sassy bad boy is."

"I jess pines teh hit dat boy. Doesn' you, Brudder Ramus?" said Remus.

"No, I doesn'. What call is I got teh want teh hit folkses? Tell me dat, Remus!" replied Ramus.

"Well," said Melindy, "I wouldn' jess essackly advise you teh hit Edwin, Ramus, an' dat's a fac'.

Fightin' wif Edwin aint essackly what you'd call a beautifier teh nobody."

Two of Melindy's errands were performed simultaneously. For she found General Haviland a visitor in Mr. Mandeville's dim library.

Mr. Mandeville lay back in a wicker reclining chair, smoking a long, thin pipe. He looked very pale and languid and his eyes were drawn.

"I thought I had no hope, all these years," he had been saying. "It is an interesting bit of psychology, Havvy, to observe the difference it makes in you whether you *think* you have no hope or *know* you have none. I can make a monograph of the idea some day, perhaps. I feel as if I were dead,— and not yet tabulated for any destination. No place on earth for me, every cable cut, and not yet received elsewhere,— a not wholly painful aloofness, Havvy!"

But Mr. Mandeville winced when he said it, and the General reached over and laid his hand on his friend's knee.

"If he — Carl — had written only a few days earlier," said Mr. Mandeville, "only a few days,— I should have reached him in time, have learned what he wished of me and he would not have died in Ecuador, alone, poor and among strangers. I am always missing destiny by just a few days. There is an interesting theory among the Japanese,— not very credible, perhaps,— acknowledging upon what small chances, insignificant causes, unconsidered

agencies, human destinies hang. Ah, Melindy! Come in, child. What beautiful flowers!"

"How-d'ye, sah, Marse Mandeville, sah! Our Miss Nat'lie done growed dese hyah flowers her own se'f. How-d'ye, sah, Gin'al Hav'lan', sah! Hyah's a letter for you, sah. Please sah, kin I jess put dese flowers in de water myse'f, Marse Mandeville, please, sah? Dey's sech pretty posies an' dat-ar butler ob yourn he jess natchully doan' know what teh do wif flowers. He pounds dem down so flat an' even, lak he was layin' a pavement. When he fixes 'em, dey doan' look natchul nohow. Dey looks jess lak artificial art."

"Put them in the green vase, Melindy. That one at the end of the stand."

"Dis-ar black-an'-green one dat's got onhealthy scum lak comes on de top ob ole water-ponds?"

Mr. Mandeville smiled and nodded, "Thank you, — that one,— yes!"

"An insult to my Pompeian bronze, Havvy!" he said, as Melindy left with the vase to fill it with water.

The General had been thinking abstractedly throughout the interlude and spoke as if there had been no interruption.

"Ebers," said he, "you are making a mistake. I've never been one to give gratuitous advice,— you know that. And I'm not asking you to take my advice now. But there *is* a place in life for you. Only you must go out and take it. Never saw *any* office seeking a man unless the man showed some sort of

adaptability for it,— or at least willingness. There isn't any sense in your burying yourself alive. Never was any sense in it. You made a mistake once,— so be it! All that is over. Foolish to brood over it until Doomsday. It never was a very serious mistake,— except in its consequences. You're a learned man as one consequence, by the way. Now, go give the world some use of that. You've a loving nature, old man. Go love something!"

Mr. Mandeville smiled sadly, shook his head and extended empty hands and arms with an eloquent gesture.

The General continued, "I'm an old soldier and I know, Ebers, that obedience to life is a man's first duty. Obedience to life doesn't mean *resignation*, to my mind. It means the determination to take the means at hand and go on living fully."

"Ah, my dear Havvy, what means for a complete life —"

"Determine to live and they will be found or supplied. Why, my dear boy, when the Confederacy's fall left me without an occupation and the Reconstruction period froze me out of politics, and my lady-love chose a better man, and my dear brother and his sweet wife died in the fever, I thought,— 'most anyone would have thought,— that I was unanchored too. But what a life-line I got in my boys, my nephews! What joyous, interesting living they've opened up to me! Even the glorious compensation of having my boy win Her girl! —"

"Indeed, I have thought of it, Haviland, and been so glad for you."

"Yes. But who'd have supposed those two wailing, orphan babies were a blessing to a bachelor soldier without a commission! That is why I say, Ebers, that there is a life-line for you, too. Look out for it. There's always a life-line. Only a man mustn't drift so far from shore that it cannot reach him!"

Melindy returning had set the vase of flowers down carefully upon the mahogany stand. A portrait, the counterpart of the one she had seen in General Haviland's study, stood beside it.

Again she was haunted by a strange sense of familiarity, a certainty that this bright, dashing personality was not unknown to her. She had felt its charm, she was sure. Painstakingly, slowly she read the name,— the strange, foreign name,— written boldly beneath it. There was no help in that. She did not know the name.

"I feels jess lak when you kin remember a tune an' yit jess cayn't hum it ner whistle it," she thought. "Is I saw dat gempman when I was li'l an' lived on de plantation, I wonders? Sho' am funny how a thing you *knows* you knows kin sort o' fade away an' poke its tongue out at you!"

On the way to perform her third errand, she was so absorbed, searching her mind for the elusive memory, that the Twinses, after having spoken to her twice without reply, exchanged anxious glances.

"Twinses," said Melindy suddenly, to their great

relief, "I wants teh ax you somepin'. How does you help yo'se'f teh remember anythin' you done fergot?"

"I doan' never fergit nothin'," said Ramus, "'cause nobody never entrustes me wif anythin' teh remember. Dey alluz axes Remus teh remember. I ain' never remembered nothin' ner fergot nothin'."

"Whenebber I fergits, I alluz unwinds myse'f," said Remus.

"How does you unwind yo'se'f, Remus?" asked Melindy deeply interested.

Remus was overjoyed at the rarely-given chance to instruct her very wise young leader.

"Well, Melindy," she explained, "s'posin' ma Maw sont me an' Ramus teh de sto' an' tells us teh git a pound ob soap fer washin' clothes. Well den; we goes, doan' we? Da's natchul! Well, den we sees a white rabbit an' looks at it awhile in Miss Pearson's gyarden; doan' we? Sho'ly, we do. Well, den we meets Nanny at her Maw's missus's house's gate an' we gotteh say, 'How-d'ye, Nanny!'; isn't we? *'Co'se* we is! Den, when we gits teh de sto' we is mo' dan likely teh done fergot what we was sont fer; ain't us? Da's natchul, too! So den we's *got*-a remember or else we's got-a git a lammin'. So we jess unwinds ourselves. We goes right back; firs' we stops at Nanny's Maw's missus's house's gate an' say, 'How-d'ye, Nanny!'— den we sees de white rabbit awhile in Miss Pearson's gyarden — den, by dat *time, we's* home an' we's done unwound our minds right

back teh de place whar our Maw sont us teh de sto' fo' somefin'. An' so den we knows dat she done sont us fo'— *what* is I said she done sont us fo', Melindy?"

Melindy laughed. "You's awful smaht, Twinses!" said she, "but dat ain't jess de sort ob memorying I means. Nemmin'! Le's play we is m'lasses an' de streets is hot gingerbread an' de convent school is somebody's mouf, an' le's see how quick we kin run inteh it."

As the big convent school loomed in view, Melindy looked ruefully at the fig-tree from which the heiress of the Hernandez had cast missiles and scorn upon her. The memory of that lesson made her extend a hand affectionately to each of her faithful Twinses.

Still, the environment of the old bewitchment, the green latticed gate, newly painted and glowing in the distance like a beacon, restored to her heart some of its romantic interest in the child who had so stirred her fancy. She felt a little quiver of excitement in the hope that she might again catch a glimpse of her Beautiful Cuba.

It is a custom in New Orleans to have the fine needlework for layettes, confirmations, graduations, weddings and all the great events of life made by the sisters in the French convents. These good ladies have preserved,— and they alone, in equal measure,— mediæval artistry in skill with the needle.

Remus and Ramus waited on the street corner,

greatly awed to see the well-guarded green gate open freely to Melindy.

Melindy looked about her at the brick-paved yard, the formal flower-beds, the interesting, swarthy, romping children, the kind little ladies in black gliding quietly, commandingly among them. She stood where she had so often longed to stand. But there was no trace of Hecuba, the child who had so charmed her.

Two of the sisters led Melindy to a little dark anteroom and gave her a stool to sit upon. "Wait here," said one. "You are early. The last monogram is not complete."

Melindy bowed politely, said "Thanky ma'ms!" carefully emphasizing the plural, and took her seat as they left her.

She would have preferred to wait outdoors watching the children, but she sat down obediently as bidden. There was a heavy odor of dried rose-petals rising from a black-and-gold lacquer jar upon the table. The room was vault-like, cool and languorous. On the window-pane, behind the green shade, a lazy fly hummed sleepily. On the white marble mantelshelf a great white marble clock ticked in a deep whisper.

Melindy was just drowsily closing her agate-brown eyelids over her velvet eyes when a peculiar sound brought her wide-awake and at attention.

Somewhere in the room, someone was sobbing.

Frightened but resolute, Melindy rose and searched.

In a dark corner, hidden by an old settee, she found a little figure huddled,— a pathetic little figure, relaxed and quivering after an abandonment of grief.

Melindy approached and touched it tenderly.

Beautiful Cuba, her great eyes all but closed with weeping, her proud mouth tremulous and tragic, turned her head and looked unseeingly at Melindy.

"Po' li'l lamb!" cried Melindy, pityingly, and took her to her heart. No word was said. Melindy's whole being yearned to give comfort and the forlorn child felt and reached out for it. Hecuba cried silently on little Melindy's shoulder.

Two schoolmates looked in from the hall.

"Poor Hecuba!" said one.

"What's the matter with her?" asked the other.

"Why, didn't you know?" unconscious of her cruel carelessness in speaking where Hecuba must hear, or placing too great reliance on her subject's slight knowledge of English. "Her father died, and her mother is dead, and all the money is gone,— they had an awful lot of money,— and her mother's parents say they cannot take care of her,— they're awfully old and they live 'way off in Brazil,— and her father's people are all dead or something,— I don't know,— but anyway, Hecuba has to stay here at school forever and be a charity child —"

"No! Not that word! I will not!" blazed Hecuba, springing to her feet in a fire of rage. "I say to you, *No!* Do you not know me, who I am,—

me? My father was di Hernandez! Carlos di Hernandez!"

Melindy started. For one moment she gazed intently upon Cuba, rubbed her eyes and searched Cuba's lineaments, gravely as one awakening from a dream. Then, she gave a whoop of excitement and to the amazement of the three children fled from the building.

Like a butterfly her twinkling heels passed the bewildered Remus and Ramus on the corner; like a bird she flew back over the streets to the old dim library where General Haviland still sat with Mr. Mandeville. Like a thing distraught she poured forth to them a tale that brought them to their feet.

"It is not possible!" said Mr. Mandeville.

"There *was* a child," said General Haviland, "a child of his later years. And, by George! — I *do* remember! Her name was Hecuba!"

That night when the sudden darkness fell upon the old garden, Mr. Mandeville went out among the weeds and tangled bushes and looked up at the stars. He seemed to grow in stature, he held his head so high. His lips moved as the lips of one in prayer.

He passed from the garden, through the French windows and into the greater darkness of the library. He lit a candle and held it before the faded picture of Carlos di Hernandez. The candle light fell upon the vase of cactus flowers that Nathalie had sent. Ebers Mandeville broke a brilliant blossom from its

stem and mounted the stairs, bearing it in one hand and the lighted candle in the other.

Very softly he entered a great chamber, bare, all but unfurnished.

Here, on a cot in the moonlight, lay a child asleep.

Shading his candle, the old man bent above her.

Even in sleep, there was fire under her dark lids, there were flame and life in the passionate relaxation of the wide-flung arms, defiance in the unrestrained dark cloud of hair, eager charm in the parted lips.

Mr. Mandeville laid the red flower on the pillow beside the child. A great tear fell like a drop of dew upon it.

"Our daughter, Carlos!" the old scholar whispered.

The child turned, half opened her eyes, murmured sleepily, "My new Uncle Ebers!" and closed her warm fingers upon his trembling hand.

To his boys in the cottage, General Haviland was saying, "Thus Melindy threw him the life-line! As Ebers says that some Japanese theorists hold,— on what insignificant agencies our destinies depend!"

CHAPTER XV

THE CENTER OF THE STAGE

"Sis Suky, kin I please'm, put on ma red gloves to go to de school graduation exercises? Ma red gloves is so pretty an' sweet."

"Fo' de land's sake, chile! Is you sho' 'nough crazy haided? Gloves! It's de hottes' day in de year."

"Well, ma hands feel kine o' cole, Sis Suky."

"Come hyah teh me an' lemme tech 'em. No, dey doan'. Dey doan' feel cole teh me at all."

"Well, dey feels cole teh *me* an' I'se jined on teh dem. Kin I, please'm, wear ma pretty red gloves, Sis Suky?"

Suky waived reply.

"Does you know yo' piece de teacher writ out fo' you to say,—'Farewell teh de Graduates'?"

"Oh, yas'm!" Melindy's face fell. "It's a awful silly piece," she added ruefully.

"Stand ober dar, while I whip up dis custard, an' say it so's I kin see ef you knows it right."

"I knows it right smart enough," obediently taking her stand opposite Suky. "Shall I make dat li'l fool cutsey dat looks lak beginnin' to set down on de floor an' changin' yo' mind an' bouncin' up agin'?"

"Yes. Do it all, de way she tole you. Doan' talk so much, but go ahaid an' *do* it."

So Melindy curtsied and began:

"Dear Schoolmates who are about teh leave us —

"Now ain' dat silly, Sis Suky? Why is dey about teh leave us? Maria libs jess 'cross de street at de Lyonses and Tom an' Judy play right ober dar at Bienville's whar deir daddy works, an' I goes to Sunday School wif three of 'em, an' I sees 'em all, all ober de yearth, more'n I wants teh. *'Bout teh leave us.* Huh!

"Dear Schoolmates, who are about teh leave us.
You are gwine out inteh de great worl'—

"Whar's dat? Dey ain't gwine no-place.

"Well equipped fo' life's battles —

"Ef dat Judy saw a battle, she'd run a mile,— ef she didn' die ob fright befo' she got a start.

"Well equipped fo' life's battles, by what you hab learned hyah —

"All I kin say is, Sis Suky, dat dey's mighty easy equipped.

"We know dat you will live nobly up teh de bes' dat has been taught you,—

"Wish I could hold up two fingers of each hand when I says dat, teh show it's a quotation. Mebbe

de *teacher* knows it, but we chilluns doan' know whar dem graduates gwine do.

"You shall be sadly missed f'um yo' accustomed places—

"Our class is gwine-a hab dat class's desks next term an' dey's de bes' desks in de school. Us kin hahdly wait 'twell dem graduates gits out.

"An' all de happy hours we spent togedder—

"Dey warn't nothin' speshul!

"shell be fo' ebber remembe'd. Remember us too, deah frien's,—

"Ain't much chance to fergit us when we runs into 'em eberywhar dey goes.

"An' be free to call upon us fo' all de lovin' kinenesses dat frien's kin render frien's.—

"Hope dat ole Tom won't think he kin keep a-comin' hyah, borrowin' all ma belongin's an' never bringin' 'em back, jess 'cause I done spoke dat po-'try.

"Farewell! May all de joys in de worl' be wif you!"—

Here Melindy laughed roguishly, "I hopes dey'll leave jess a *few* joys fo' de res' ob us! Hey, Sis?

"All de joys, de blessin's and de virtues. Farewell teh you, boys an' gals, teh one an' all!—

"*One* an' all! Which one, I wonders? Den I makes ma bow agin.

"An' de graduatin' class done heard me rehearse tellin' 'em 'Farewell!' ebery day fo' a month. Reckon dey'll be mighty pleased teh think dey's a-lissinin' fo' de las' time, Sis Suky.

"Ev'y time I meets Maria on de street she say, 'Farewell!' an' I say, 'To one an' all, to two an' all, to three an' all, to fo' an' all!' I laks dat Maria. She's real pleasant.

"Kin I wear ma red gloves, Sis Suky?"

"I'll see what Miss Carrie say 'bout dat," evaded Suky. "Seems teh me dat all creamy white is much prettier fo' Commencement Day."

"Well, Sis, when I sees a row ob li'l brown niggahs all in white dresses it makes ma mouf water fo' chocolate an' vanilla ice cream," teased Melindy.

"Well, anyway, I'se got teh go practice ma song. Ma *song's* real pretty," tentatively.

But all singing unless its content came from the hymnal seemed to Suky irreligious and vain. Therefore Melindy was not encouraged to proceed.

Upstairs, Eulalia and the boys were beseeching to be taken to hear Melindy speak her piece and sing her song. Miss Carrie demurred, but Nathalie came to the rescue.

"I'll go with them, Carolina; I'd love to. We can drive there and have the horses wait. It will be a lark and Melindy would so enjoy having the children present."

"All right,— Everybody's Friend! Go on. But, seriously, my dear, I have some uneasiness as to how far we ought to encourage Melindy's love of admiration. I wouldn't make her arrogant or selfish and forward and self-seeking for the world."

"Melindy? You couldn't. She loves praise just as every one does. Only she's frank enough to enjoy it openly. She isn't a bit selfish and wants others to be praised too. And this is such a great occasion!"

The great and rapturous occasion began for Melindy with the family's inspection of her glory, when she came "all duded up" into Miss Carrie's room before her departure.

Her white embroidery frock, her mistress's gift, was bedecked with gorgeous bright blue bows,— a concession for the denial of the scarlet gloves. Her slender black-stockinged legs terminated in wonderful shiny black slippers with enormous blue love knots; her "pig-tails" were tied generously with blue, and she wore Suky's blue china beads.

Suky was large, even ponderous. The blue bead chain that amply fit her ample girth was festooned into five long necklaces upon Melindy. On her arm were braided bracelets made of the young palmetto,— latania — by the Indians who kept their posts around the old French market. Heavy cheap perfumes had been literally poured upon her.

In spite of all the artificial deterrents, she was charming. Her dimples were never still, her eyes

were aglow, her tiny white teeth flashed, she twinkled from head to heels, first on one foot then on the other, aglow with delightful anticipation.

And glory of glories! Her "white folks" were coming to the exercises! She was going to drive up in state in the carriage with her white folks.

The carriage driven by Lewis, laden with Nathalie and the children, went slowly. On the sidewalk close behind, all the negro servants of the household and many admiring friends, young and old, walked proudly in proud Suky's train. One on each side of Suky came the devoted Twinses, extra starched, crackling in dignity and triumph.

A shrill whistle came across the street to them, followed by hoots, jeers and all manner of cat-calls.

The Boy from Back o' Town with a bundle under his arm and his eyes straight in front,— so that he might have been hooting the thin air for all contrary legal evidence that could be adduced — passed quickly, on the run.

But Melindy's ecstasy was beyond the reach of vulgar insult.

The school exercises were held in the lodge hall of the Colored Knights of Lohengrin,— a stable-like structure with a stage.

It was ablaze with lights and banners. Already almost all the canvas folding-chairs were filled with the excited "kin-folks" of the graduates and performers.

From the room back of the stage a steady rising

murmur indicated that the pupils of the school were fast congregating for the great event.

Squeals of envious pleasure went up when Melindy entered with her panoply of blue ribbons and the gorgeous beads.

The girls and boys were crowded close about the perspiring teacher, a young and not very efficient colored woman, who vainly endeavored to separate performers and graduates from the rank and file of the school.

Some of the children were hysterically giggling, many were "saying their pieces" over and over under their breath, afraid lest some rare gem escape their minds at the last unguarded moment. Some were in a panic of stage fright.

Only one to whom excitement was the breath of life, one whose self-confidence allowed no fear of failure, sailed serenely through the tangled mass, smiling and *dégagée*.

"Fo' de lan' sakes, chilluns!" she said with great good humor, "cayn't you-all git in line lak Teacher tell you? Looky hyah,— shet up a minute; you-all talks lak a parrot dat done swallered a alarm clock — Shet up, cayn't you? Teacher cayn't answer all de questions at once. Now all dat's got to go on de stage git ober *yonder* an' all de res' ob you git ober *yander*. Das de way. Now, you-all ober dar ax de teacher questions and you-all ober hyah kin ax *me*. An' ef I doan' know de answers," smiling, "well, den, *I won't* tell you dem.

"An' doan' be worried 'bout yo' pieces, M'ria an' Tom. I'll set right nigh de bofe ob you, an' ef you fergits any part I kin tell you. I knows *all* yo' pieces. I says 'em in ma sleep."

Poor Maria, who had been chosen Valedictorian of her class, felt that her valedictory would indeed be a farewell address.

"Oh, M'lindy," said she, "ef ever I lives through dis-ar piece, I 'specks I'll jess die ob joy. M'lindy, I kin feel dat piece jess *leakin'* outen ma haid."

"Hurry up, den, put yo' fingers in yo' years! You'll be all right, Maria.

"Come-long, now chilluns. Yeah's de music. Tá-lala-la, Tá-la-la!"

The file of trembling children entered, to applause. Most of them were miserable in two extremities, in their minds, which felt too empty, and their shoes, which felt too full.

Poor Artemisia's new slippers held her literally rooted to the spot, and poor Maria shuffled forward as one doomed.

A few better-poised characters grinned at their friends in the audience with enjoyment of their own transitory importance.

Melindy was always important. But her soul devoured this occasion.

The minister asked a blessing, to which many of the children most eagerly assented,— they felt that they needed it and the few moments of prayer put off the evil hour of trial.

The opening chorus was sung in a hazy dream. The too ambitious teacher had chosen an air from the *Bohemian Girl*, utterly uninteresting to her charges. If only a song of Melindy's selection could have been given to warm them up, the terrible misfortune might not have fallen upon them.

But, no! Slowly dragged the melody in plaintive tones, slowly descended the fear.

Tom was called to the front to recite "Horatius."

Tom was a steady, plodding, earnest lad on whom one could always depend for anything that was commonplace and expected. He had no flame, but a steady glow.

He licked his lips over and over and began in tremolo:

"Porsena — — — Clusium
— — nine gods — — — swo'
— — great house — — — Tarkin
Sh'suf' wrong n' mo'
— — nine gods — swo' it
Umm — m — trystin' day
An' bady messingies ride fo'th
Eas' an' wes' an' souf an' norf
'Ummon 'is-array."

For an endless time the shaky unintelligible drawl continued. And panic crept over the pupils, drowsiness over the audience like a cloud.

As a clock runs down Tom's voice ceased motion. He bowed and took his seat amid wild applause that scared him more than the ordeal had.

"Oh! Foolish teacher," thought Miss Nathalie,

"now, now is your opportunity. Call upon Melindy now!"

But the teacher was saving her best effects to make a climax, as she thought.

She achieved one sooner than she expected.

A song followed Tom's effort and served to stimulate jaded faculties a trifle.

Maria whispered to Melindy, "How do ma piece begin, Melindy? How do ma piece begin?"

Melindy told her.

"Oh! I hopes I kin 'member. I hopes I kin. Ma pa'll sho' lick me wif a slipper ef I doan'. How do it go? Tell me agin."

Melindy told her.

Artemisia leaned forward and whispered in Melindy's ear, "Honey, does you think anybody'll see me ef I slips off ma slippers jess fo' a second? Dey shore is scaldin' ma feets."

Before Melindy could advise, the awful call came forth, "Maria!"

Someone rose. Maria was not conscious of any part in that motion until she found herself standing tongue-tied before a sea of troubled faces.

"Bow!" commanded Teacher.

Maria bowed.

"Dear teachers, schoolmates, classmates an' frien's," frantically whispered Melindy behind her.

Maria acquiesced.

Undoubtedly those were the words. Only she could not say them.

The terrible pause grew longer. Maria's mother got out her pocket-handkerchief. Maria's father doubled his fists. Somebody in the rear of the room snickered, but was immediately silenced by the inimical glares of popular disapproval.

Maria stood petrified.

"Sit down," said the embarrassed teacher. "Try again later."

Someone sat down. Maria found herself in the chair. She was still beyond the reach of any emotion but bewildered horror.

Melindy's eyes were full of tears.

"Jenny!" called the teacher.

Jenny rose very quickly and fairly ran forward. Her "piece" was James Whitcomb Riley's "Raggedy Man." She gave such an impression of eagerness that every one breathed a sigh of expectant relief. But her hurry was mere hysteria.

"De raggeddy, raggeddy, raggeddy man,"

began Jenny. Then in a silly giggle continued,

"De raggeddy, raggeddy, *raggeddy* man,
De raggeddy, *raggeddy*, raggeddy man,
De *raggeddy*, raggeddy, raggeddy man!"

with laughter mounting higher,

"De raggeddy, raggeddy, raggeddy man,
De raggeddy, raggeddy, raggeddy man!"

Hilariously, accompanied by all the audience,

"De raggeddy, raggeddy, raggeddy man!"

until the distracted teacher came and dragged her bodily from the scene, still calling,

"De raggeddy, raggeddy, raggeddy man!"

in a wild falsetto.

Then pandemonium! Some children incontinently fled to the dressing room; many sat bathed in tears; the teacher's lips trembled with shame and vexation. She had completely lost control of the situation. Several cried out urging it upon her that they had forgotten their parts and must not be called; others sobbed aloud. Maria still was a statue.

Melindy rose and came to the footlights. She held out her skirts prettily and made her "cutsey."

Tears and beseechings ceased. Even Maria and the despairing teacher looked out interestedly. The sudden silence brought the deserters back from the dressing room to the stage.

"Lemme tell you-all somefin'," said Melindy confidentially. "Somebody's done hoodooed dis-hyah school. We's real smart when we's well."

Pæans of delighted laughter greeted this sally.

"You see," Melindy continued, "we ain' used to bein' so fixed up an' in a real hall an' havin' ebery-body starin' at ús lak we's jess somefin elegant.

"Now, please, ladies, an' gempmen, jess stay whar you is an' doan' laugh ner clap ner nothin',— jess pertend you'se gone asleep. An' I'll fix up dese hyah busted up graduation exercises. Sh-h-h!" she called, holding up her finger warningly.

The audience chuckled, the children forgot to be self-conscious, frightened and wretched, as they confidently waited for Melindy to "fix-up" the sad fiasco. The tearful teacher, smiling sheepishly, retired in her favor.

Melindy turned her back on the spectators,— not forgetting to rearrange the gay blue sash — and faced the scholars.

The well-known dimply smile was in itself a new lease upon every-day calm.

"Reckon we-all didn' hab no dress-up rehearsal," she said. "Das de trouble. Marse George's *Shakspere S'ciety* always hab a dress-up rehearsal. An' dey sho' do look lak Mardi Gras! *Mens* wif li'l puffses fo' pants! — So now, we'll jess stand sideways, so's de aujence cayn't git a good look at us, an' we won't speak so very loud, an' I'll be de teacher an' stand ober hyah an' you'll be de scholars an' jess look at me an' we-all will jess practice our pieces. An' if we done fergot 'em we'll jess say some udder piece dat we *ain't* fergot."

The children, accustomed to following Melindy's lead and fired with the novelty of the game and the hope of relief from their disgrace, allowed her to hypnotize them into forgetfulness of the invited guests.

They sang their songs and spoke their pieces with gusto. Miraculously the lost words and tunes restored themselves.

The audience, too, tried hard to obey instructions and be silent.

But it was hard not to applaud when, Melindy having called, "Maria, come along now. 'Member we-uns ain' nebber gwine-a fergib you, ef you leave dis-hyah school widout tellin' good-by teh yo' dear teachers, schoolmates, classmates an' frien's who hab been wif you all through yo' years ob childhood —"

"— bofe in work an' in play," Maria took up the tale and carried it to a triumphant end.

It was a strain not to laugh aloud when at the call of his name Tom began "Horatius" and Melindy stopped him saying, "Tommy, we doan' lak dat ole pome 'bout soldiers sassin' each yuther. We laks yo' piece 'bout de yaller gal. Dat's a *awful* pretty piece. Say dat now." And Tom dutifully began:

Once dey was a yaller gal,
Had possum in a pot;
'Long dey come some company
An' sot an' sot an' sot.

Five was in de company,
'Possum 'nough fo' four.
Yaller gal got up teh talk,
Aidgin' to de door.

Company's a mind to stay,
Lak dat 'possum smell,
Say, "It's early in de day,
Guess we'll stop a spell."

Yaller gal say, "Gwine teh rain,
Cloud's begun to swell,"
Comp'ny sing out, "Dat doan' hurt,
We's got a omberell."

Yaller gal jess dyin' to eat
Feel herse'f git thinner,
Say, "Please entertain yo'se'f,
While I go eat ma dinner."

Gibs 'em an ole book to read,
Comp'ny say, "Good-day!
It's gittin' late, it's gwine to rain,
We libs so fur away!"

The audience could contain itself no longer. It rose in a burst of laughter and applause.

The happy school turned to face it, and so facing sang heartily, spontaneously the farewell song.

The laughing minister "gave out" the certificates, all tied in crimson ribbon.

The proud graduates and their schoolfellows descended to the plaudits of the crowd.

Nathalie folded Melindy in her arms and kissed her. Suky wiped her eyes and patted the child's head proudly.

"I sho' war smart to mek 'em say dey pieces so pretty," Melindy congratulated herself as they went out into the starlight to the carriage.

A dissatisfied grunt at her elbow made her turn sharply around.

There stood Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche with a big bouquet in his arms.

"Smart nothin'!" he growled. "Didn't I come all de way up hyah teh gib you dese flowers when you done spoke yo' piece an' sung yo' song? An' *you's de only one dat ain' spoke a piece ner sung a song ner done nothin'!*"

Melindy stopped aghast. It was true! Lost in her rôle of teacher, saving the day for the others, she had not called upon herself!

Then she dimpled.

"Well," she said, "das a'right. Eberybody knows dat I kin speak an' sing. Thanks fo' de flowers, Edwin."

Miss Nathalie laughed.

"Caroline needn't worry about Melindy's being spoiled and wanting to have all the glory. Bless her! And as for trying to preëmpt the center of the stage,— why she doesn't have to. Wherever Melindy is, the center of the stage is there."

CHAPTER XVI

THE GARDEN OF THE GODS

THE Northern moon is the soul of the night; the Southern moon is its heart. The Northern moon is the sculptor's Diana, cold, austere, distant, serene; but the Southern moon is that dazzling virgin herself, the goddess a glimpse of whose radiance drove men mad. A golden moon, a moon that denies the astronomers, is not content to reflect the sun but must give out light of itself! The moon in the North sends beams of luscent crystal, but the moon of the South unfurls glowing sheets of true transparent gold. The Northern moon inspires the poet to dream of lovers, but the moon in the South is the lamp of love.

It flooded the garden of the Big White House, pulsating with the perfumes of thousands of flowers; it swept triumphantly across the porches through sweet vine curtains; it glimmered among the twinkling leaves of the camphor trees and shimmered on the sword-blades of the palms; it cast its illumination on the hoary moss of the live-oak, changing its gray age to shining youth; it made true lanterns of light of the great magnolia blossoms and charmed the lily-pond to be a mirror of its loveliness.

Nathalie stood upon the steps and gloried in the beauty.

"Oh, come! Carolina, come!" she called. "Come, George, come! You must not miss a moment of this night. The cereus blossoms chose a wonderful time to be born. They will know how beauteous the world is as soon as they open their eyes upon it. Oh! I do hope our guests will be early!"

"One will," teased Marse George from the hall. "There's Robert now I believe. Good-even, Doctor Bob!"

The young Doctor came briskly up the pathway.

"Agostine and Gerald may be a little late," he announced. "Uncle is coming with Mr. Mandeville and little Hecuba."

The occasion of the opening of the night-blooming cereus flowers,— especially when a large number are due to open on one night,— is made an informal fiesta in New Orleans gardens. Friends gather to see the marvelous unfolding of the large, waxy, etherealized-fleshy, fragrant oval buds as, for a period of hours, they swell to maturity, then suddenly burst into enormous many-pointed stars, all purest white except the golden sun at the heart, and pour forth streams of luxuriant perfume.

Twenty blossoms were to reach their prime that night and friends were coming to see their splendor.

At a distance, behind the rose-trellis, awaiting their guests, too, sat the servants with banjos and refresh-

ment. They would be summoned to enjoy the beauty of the blossoms when they opened. No family celebration in the Big White House ever overlooked these family wards and friends.

Peter, Eustace, Eulalia and Melindy, allowed to "stay up" for the great occasion, ran from group to group enjoying their unusual privilege.

"Ef you gits sleepy, Missy Euly, honey," warned Melindy, "you musn' be a li'l goosey-gander an' go tellin' Mammy dat you's sleepy, 'cause, ef you does, Mammy'll sho'ly put you teh bed. Den, whar'll you be? Now, jess lissen teh me, Missy 'Lalia! You jess tell yo' own Melindy ef you's sleepy an' I'll jess tuck you up in de hammock an' wake you when de posies opens."

"Will that be all fair, Melindy?"

Melindy gazed at her in admiring exasperation.

"Missy," said she, "dat-ar goodness ob yourn suttinly is a drawback. Of *co'se*, it's all fair. Ain't hammockses dar fo' folks teh sleep in? Didn' your mother say you-all could stay up? Is gwine teh bed stayin' up? Missy Euly, you minds me ob a li'l boy up on de plantation. He was so do-es-you're-toldsy, jess lak you is. One day he done promise his Maw he wouldn' ax fo' nothin' when he went teh pay a visit down de road an' spend de day. An' while he was dar spendin' de day, his li'l suspender button done bus'ed off, an' dat obedient li'l idjit had teh hold his clothes on all day long wif his hands, 'cause he was too mortal good to ax fo' a pin."

"That *was* a little bit silly, Melindy. But you mustn't break promises, you know."

"No'm. Das-so!" agreed Melindy. "You doesn' need teh bus' dem; dat's a fac'. But you kin sometimes jess sort-er lean over 'em fo' a minute. Oh! Looky! Hyah comes all de li'l niggahs in de city. Us must be goin'-a hold a camp-meetin'."

Through the back gate came Artemisia, Nanny, Lucy, Jake and Remus and Ramus, all trying to ignore Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche, the Boy from Back o' Town, who danced around them in a circle, singing in a whispered imitation of his professional manner, "Oh! See de black-berries! Hyah y'are! Fraish blackberries!"

Melindy hurried back to do the honors, while Eulalia rushed forward to meet Agostine entering with Gerald.

Close behind them came General Haviland and Mr. Mandeville with his little Hecuba, who clung to his hand with both of hers and looked about her with marveling eyes.

"Lovely!" she sighed, "Loveliest garden!"

In spite of her awed admiration, her feeling of strangeness and her significant tight clutch upon "Uncle Ebers's" hand, she greeted her new acquaintances with a superbly poised grace and courtesy, unchildishly correct and formal.

But Miss Carrie's mother-sense perceived the timidity in the beaming, brave eyes of the little stranger. Her quick vision reached the momentary quiver

of the proudly pouting lower lip. And her heart burned to heat the nervously cold fingers of the small swarthy hand placed so politely in hers.

Miss Carrie dropped upon her knees and put her arms about Hecuba and held her close and kissed her lips. The child gave a laughing sob and returned the kiss,— so warmly! — and became a little girl again, unself-conscious and at ease.

Little Eulalia came and took her hand,— a true daughter of the house.

"Would you wish to see my Cheeweety?" she invited. "She's asleep now. But you can see her. She all fluffs up when she's asleep. Maybe you won't like her. *I* think she's very pretty; but Melindy says that if they killed things for being pretty my Cheeweety would be the last chicken left in the world."

Hecuba, not understanding the words but feeling Eulalia's hospitality, smiled upon her and the two went off together. But Hecuba was not ungrateful to the source of her new happiness. "I wish, if you please, to see the little brown Melindy,— for she was my first of friends," she requested.

The night-blooming cereus buds were slow in swelling. Pending the tardy achievement of Flora, other gods and heroes took possession of the garden.

Back of the rose-trellis, gently the banjo twanged and husky-sweet voices, led by Rastus and Sis Hannah Jackson,— those wondrous organ-toned negro voices — seductive as Orpheus, floated tenderly on the air.

Led by Eros, Robert and Our Nathalie laughed among the roses, Gerald and Agostine bent pensively above the water-lily pool.

Hercules, skilled in friendship, rejoiced in the old soldier and old scholar who tramped the winding pathways, arm in arm.

Hymen smiled at the master and mistress, as Peter and Eustace stood before them, asking grave questions as to the strange habits of Nature.

To them appeared Melindy, embarrassed.

"Miss Carrie, honey," she said, "axin' yo' pahdon, Miss Carrie! — I done fergot teh tell you dat, when I was down-town teh see Miss Euph'seen, tehday, I done invited Miss Euph'seen teh come hyah teh-night. I done said, 'Teh be sho', Miss Carrie an' Marse George an' Miss Nat'lie wishes you teh come!' I done took a liberty; 'scuse me, please'm, Miss Carrie. Miss Euph'seen ain't been spry lately. She's sort-er solemncholy, Miss Carrie, honey. You does want Miss Euph'seen,— doesn' you? — lak I done said you did? You better speak up quick, ef you doan' want her, Miss Carrie. 'Cause hyah's Miss Euph'seen comin' up de path wif Aunt Clem, now!"

As they hastened forward to greet the unexpected guest, Miss Carrie asked Melindy *sotto voce*,— thinking of Mr. Mandeville's presence,— "Did you tell Miss Euphrosyne who were to be here?"

"Yas'm. I did 'm. She said she's sho' come ef li'l Hecuby was a comin'. She sho'ly do want teh see ma li'l 'Cuby."

"Really! — A good fairy leads this child, George!"

As Miss Euphrosyne Myrtilla Du Fossat came through the gateway, the moon, or some other of the gods of the evening, played a strange trick of joy. Perhaps they wished to reward the old scholar who had been the devotee of classic myths throughout his life. At least, it is certain that Mr. Mandeville stood still in the pathway, entranced. It is certain that where other, younger, brighter eyes saw only a faded, crotchety, angular old lady, his tired old eyes beheld the handsome girl whose memory had dominated his life.

"Myrtilla!" he called.

With her usual directness, Miss Euphrosyne went straight to him, her hands extended. "Ebers," said she, "I have come here to see *you*,— you and the child."

"You have forgiven?"— oblivious of Miss Carrie and Marse George, who stood aloof.

"Forgiven *you!* Ah! You are to forgive *me*, Ebers. I've grown old in a week and learned this wisdom: There are only two things on this earth, my friend, worth having in your heart when you are old. Love and charity of judgment! I have rather scorned you, always, Mandeville," said the downright old lady, "but you deserve and have them both, both love and tolerance. Forgive a poor old woman who has been denied the one because she denied herself the *other!*"

She held out her two hands to Mr. Mandeville, who raised them to his trembling lips.

A shout went up from the children. The late-blooming flowers were opening.

Hosts and guests, little and big, white and black, crowded around the cacti. The negroes sat on the grass in a ring, encircling the garden chairs of the others. Edwin Hadley Osborne La Rouche, moved by a sudden impulse of anger, went up to Jake who sat next to Melindy and whispered threateningly, "Move on, boy. You's sittin' by ma gal! Move on, I tell you!" and forced his way between them.

"You's a wicked, onmannerly boy, Edwin," said Melindy. "Pore Jakey warn't doin' no mo' hahm dan a deaf an' dumb parrot wif his mouf tied up an' his claws cut. Less dan dat, 'cause Jakey ain't even *wishin'* no hahm an' dat-ar Polly-parrot ob mine," she laughed, "suttinly would be cussin' in his sperrit."

"Da's a'right, Melindy; but I ain't a-gwine-a allow no boy teh set down side ob you while I'se hyah. Not ef he wants teh keep on livin'," and Edwin glared at the inoffensive Jakey. "I got teh look out fo' you, Melindy, honey," pursued the Boy from Back o' Town, "'cause you is gwine-a be ma gal when you grows up; isn' you?"

Melindy dimpled, but disdained reply.

"What is you gwine-a be when you grows up, Melindy,— besides bein' ma gal?" asked the boy.

"Be? Why, jess Melindy, ob course. Does you

'spec' I'se gwine-a turn inteh a ten-thousan'-dollar beauty or a hummin' bird? Go 'long, boy!"

"You is a beauty now, an' a hummin' bird too. But I means what is you gwine-a *do* when you grows up?"

"Hmm! I ain't a-plannin' fo' next summer befo' dis summer done got hyah. You suttinly is look-aheadish, boy! I'll bet right now you doesn' know what you'se gwine teh do *teh-morrow*,—'ceptin' dat you's pretty shore not teh do nothin' tall, you lazy boy!"

Melindy's sweet smile took the sting out of her words.

"I means, what does you *hope* you'll do?" Edwin persisted. "Does you want-a be a teacher or a *what?*"

"I'se gwine-a stay wif ma Missy Euly, till I dies, an' look out fo' her, ob co'se. What ails you, boy?"

"Is you gwine-a be jess a house-servant all de time? What fo' you studies so good an' hahd, den?"

"So's I kin be smaht an' he'p Miss Euly better. Learnin' doan' hurt nobody but dem dat ain't got none."

"Well, some frien's ob mine was sayin' dat you is so smaht, yo' Sis ought teh train you fo' somefin' mo' richer an' nicer,— higher up things."

"Huh! Marse George says nothin' cayn't be no higher up dan de way you does it. An' I knows dat nothin' cayn't be no nicer dan how much you laks an'

injoys teh do it. But, den, some folks would make faces eatin' sugar."

"Dasso, Melindy. But, den, yo' fambly is better'n some white famblies —"

"Better'n *some?* Dey's de bestes' ob all, you Edwin."

"Maybe so. Maybe dey is. Anyway, ma Ma says dey condescends teh treat people like folks. But, Melindy, dese-ar frien's of mine says dar's mo' money an' mo' fun —"

"Oh! I didn' understood you, Edwin. You an' yo' smaht show-offish frien's! You's talkin' 'bout *gwine-a Git*, not *gwine-a Be*. Look out you doan' be banana peelin's an' git slipped up on. Dat's what Sis Suky says." And Melindy turned haughtily from him to watch the opening flowers.

"You sassy gal! I sho'ly likes you!"

"Does you, Edwin?" twinkling with dimples. "Everybody lubs Melindy. Da's why I lubs teh serve ma white folks, 'cause dey lubs me an' I lubs dem an' us all lubs togedder. Look at dem chulluns smilin' ober hyah! De minute anythin' happens teh dem chilluns, good or bad, one of 'em calls right out, 'Whar's Melindy?' Da's how-come I knows whar ma place is,— right hyah whar dey kin fin' me."

"Well, *I*'se alluz glad teh fin' you, all right. Will you be ma gal, Melindy, ef I tries teh be good too, lak you is?"

"Is I so good, Edwin? Won't you please tell dat

teh Sis Suky? You try bein' good first, Edwin, an' den come 'round an' ax me. Reckon we'll be growed up jess about de time you succeed," smiling, not displeased.

"I jess will, Melindy. I'se sho' gwine-a try. You'll marry me yit, gal. But it do seem teh me you knows a heap teh be jess a servant," flatteringly.

"Does I, Edwin?" tossing her head proudly. "Is I so smaht? Well, all I *wants* teh do is teh be sweet an' pleasant an' help teh make folks happy."

The light voice rose on that sentence and it reached Miss Carrie's ears.

A sudden illumination came to her heart. She looked away from the gloriously opening blossoms and upon the gloriously opening happiness of the many hearts about her. To her awakened vision, Melindy took her place, chief that night of the gods of the garden. Little brown Melindy, whose love had brought all the joy!

To be sweet and pleasant and to help to make folks happy!

What more, indeed, can any of us do?

THE END